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The City and Landscapes Beyond Harold Pinter's Rooms

by

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Summary

I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance. (Pinter).

Pinter's dramas have been labelled as 'absurd', 'mysterious', 'enigmatic', 'taciturn'. There has been a constant tendency to reduce the idea of the 'Pinteresque' to language when Pinter is preoccupied with the tensions between reality and the world of the imagination. He has, actually and accurately, used theatre as a 'critical act' to denote the abstracted realities, and he has applied his language to embody his world-view - his concerns in the contemporary capitalist world.

Pinter has journeyed from the room to the outside world, from the private to the public social space, and has identified an inescapable sense of pessimism and alienation, and investigated an alarming world of atrocities. There are cities and landscapes beyond Pinter's rooms, cities peopled by wandering, displaced figures surveying the self-estranged city that is modern consciousness, and landscapes where his people retreat into the private realms of memory and fantasy.

This thesis explores the virtual geographies beyond Pinter's rooms through the vocabulary of some modernist theoreticians and social scientists, as there are significant parallels between their analytical observations and the poetic perceptions of Pinter, a practising artist, and the phantom images of his characters.

Pinter's plays and film adaptations tend to portray the city as a colonial present, and the country as a mythological past. The 1970s' plays portray a community of isolation, urban decay, dispossession and suffering, through the figure of the '*flâneur*' - his characters' subjective experiences, memories and fantasies in the metropolis. In these memory plays, men and women have different mental landscapes and desires. To some extent the city is both a male-constructed world and an image of the twentieth century; in both senses it is anti-human and in decline.

In his 1980s mature plays, Pinter's lyrical interiors and serene landscapes are colonised by the metropolis. Here Pinter investigates a universally oppressive space filled with misery and social dislocation. The city destroys humanity in a decaying modern world. These plays identify the global city as the locus of existential alienation and as the centre of political power and oppression - a world of brute masculine power.

The last two plays in this study explore other wastelands of human isolation and suffering, and criticise the British suspicion of the 'intelligentsia'. Using scenes that are ingrained in the contemporary audience's physical memory, Pinter makes the distinction between being an active participant and being a witness, a 'spectator' in this alarming world. And thus, he criticises the tradition of mockery of the artistic and the intellectually curious in Britain, and urges a need for a 'politically curious', a 'politically questioning' theatre-going society.

INTRODUCTION: 'A KING OF INFINITE SPACE'¹

Pinter has been a theatrical institution for almost half a century, a conscientious objector in public and a political activist since the 1980s. He has explored different genres including prose and poetry, plays for stage, radio and screen. His crossover from one medium to another (his deliberate decision to write for more than one medium) has given him the opportunity to reach a potential mass audience. He has shocked, bewildered, disappointed, and astonished audiences and critics, alike.² He swiftly became accepted as Britain's premier dramatist.

¹ Harold Pinter, *The Queen of All Fairies*, *The Pinter Archive*, Loan no. 110, Box no. 60. (This is an 8 page autobiographical prose piece, written in 1949).

² During the fifty years of Pinter's career as a dramatist he has committed himself to different styles. His work has been classified as 'realist', 'surrealist', 'absurdist', 'lyrical', and 'political'. He has been compared with Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Pirandello, and Beckett. For half a century, numerous books have been written that attempt to deal with Pinter's work. He has been highly praised by one group of critics, and fiercely denounced by another. Some critics have used scientific/theoretical formulae to trace the diversity and development in Pinter's artistic creation; others have approached his texts more moderately without using any critical theories. Martin Esslin, Ruby Cohn, Bernard F. Dukore, Steven H. Gale, Katherine Burkman, Francis Gillen, Arnold P. Hinchcliffe, John Lahr, Charles Marowitz, John Russell Taylor, Irving Wardle, Michael Billington, Lois G. Gordon, Mel Gussow, Marc Silverstein, and D. Keith Peacock are only some of the many critics who have written substantially on Pinter. In 1961, Esslin classified Pinter among the English dramatists of the absurd (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 1961); whereas, in the same year, Pinter famously said, 'What goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism'. Gale observed a solid development and gradual change in the theme of menace (*Butter's Going Up*, 1977); Walter Kerr approached Pinter as an existential dramatist (*Harold Pinter*, 1967); William Baker and Stephen Tabachnick explored conflicts, such as masculine vs. feminine, and put great emphasis on Pinter's Jewishness (*Harold Pinter*, 1973); Austin Quigley restricted himself to a close examination of Pinter's language, and surveyed the causes and consequences of the impasse in Pinter criticism (*The Pinter Problem*, 1975); Guido Almansi and Simon Henderson followed deconstructionist theory (*Harold Pinter*, 1983); Gabbard made a rigorous Freudian reading of Pinter's dramas (*The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays*, 1976); Lois Gordon detected role-playing and sex from a Freudian viewpoint (*Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness*, 1968); Katherine H. Burkman analysed Pinter's plays through myth and ritual (*The Dramatic World of Harold Pinter*, 1971); Elizabeth Sakellaridou analysed Pinter's female portraits using psychoanalysis, sociology and feminism, illustratively rather than theoretically (*Pinter's Female Portraits*, 1988). However, only some of the more recent works place sufficient emphasis on Pinter's political development: Marc Silverstein's *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* (1993); D. Keith Peacock's *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre* (1997); Michael Billington's biography *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (1996); Mel Gussow's *Conversations with Pinter* (1994); Katherine Burkman and Kundert Gibbs's collection of essays in *Pinter at Sixty* (1993); and more recently, Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers's valuable survey of contemporary British theatre at the beginning of a new century, *Theatre in a Cool Climate* (1999), which starts with their interview with Pinter. Pinter's use of language, time, and memory; the relationships between his male and female characters; his personal and artistic evolution from privacy to politics - have all been noted by critics. There is one more striking development, however, which, though touched upon in critical studies, has never been analysed systematically. This concerns Pinter's treatment of 'space'.

For Pinter 'writing is discovery and journey',³ a journey that led him to become a dissident thinker. Each decade has confirmed a continuing movement in his work and 1970 was crucial because of a transformation.⁴ There was a move from East London (in many of his pre-1970 plays) to North London (his post-1970 plays), from menace to mannerism. The significance of this move from the plays' original working-class milieu towards a world of intellectual and professional middle-class culture made him a cultural icon in the 1970s. As his political development advanced in the 1980s and 1990s, his status as a world-renowned playwright, in a theatre that was increasingly looking towards the political arena, was even clearer and he became a 'political' icon, a theorist, and a critic of the social order. For Pinter 'Theatre is essentially exploratory. [...] theatre has always been a critical act'.⁵ He had been a true voyager, making maps as he went along.

In 1975, Howard Brenton dreamed 'of a play acting like a bush-fire, smouldering into public consciousness. Or - like hammering on the pipes being heard all through a tenement.' Brenton's generation - David Edgar, Edward Bond, David Hare - founded the fringe theatre whose dream was to create an 'alternative culture' as resulting from feeling the public nature of the theatre. However, Brenton regretted that the fringe had failed, and no playwright of his generation had 'written well enough yet', had 'actually got into public, actually touched life outside theatre'.⁶ A few years later, Pinter's getting into public was actually a dream come true for Brenton and his generation. As

³ Pinter at Cambridge Conference. A British Council Conference, held in Cambridge on 13 July 1999.

⁴ In 1970, Pinter wrote *Old Times*, he won the Hamburg Shakespeare Prize, an Honour Degree Litt. from the University of Reading; he wrote *No Man's Land* in 1974 (Peter Hall found himself depressed by the critics' inability to recognise the masterly way Pinter's talent was developing. He could not believe that *No Man's Land* was difficult. See *Peter Hall's Diaries*, p. 161).

⁵ Mel Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994), September 1993, p. 123.

⁶ Howard Brenton interviewed by Catherine Itzin and Simon Trussler, 'Petrol Bombs Through the Proscenium Arch', *Theatre Quarterly*, 5(1975), p. 20.

early as 1948, Pinter knew that he 'wanted to get out in the world'.⁷ And more recently, Pinter was the only person to produce an anti-war programme, for BBC2, on the calamity in the Balkans, for which he held NATO responsible; additionally, he delivered a speech on the same issue, 'The NATO Action in Serbia'.⁸ Not only Brenton, but John Arden, too, was looking for a playwright who would write the 'serious social play'; and in the early 1960s, he found Pinter's agenda frustratingly hard to define. Arden thought that, in *The Caretaker*,

the elder brother's account of his brain-operation is highly detailed and circumstantial. But is it true? If it is true, why isn't Mr Pinter writing that serious social play to denounce the cruelty prevalent in mental hospitals? And if it *isn't* true, why does it take the crucial place in the text - the climax of Act Two?⁹

Eventually, in his later stage and screen scripts, Pinter did indeed clearly criticise current widespread persecution in the institutions of the state: from hospitals (*Hothouse*)¹⁰ to prisons (*One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*). Pinter's plays reached beyond the world of the theatre and became part of the starkly politicised 1980s social and cultural scene. Above all, his work established a 'theory of power' and articulated the use/abuse of the political power of language. Pinter's work has obviously met the needs of the contemporary theatre.

Pinter's established persona, of the 1950s and 1960s, started to become unstable in the 1970s. At that time a new theatrical charter was emerging in Britain, of which perhaps Edward Bond was the symbol. While Tom Stoppard was entertaining the nation with his language games, the Royal Court fostered a wave of social realists and social critics

⁷ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 142.

⁸ Harold Pinter, 'The NATO Action in Serbia', this speech was delivered to the Confederation of Analytical Psychologists, London, 25 June 1999.

⁹ John Arden, 'Pinter's "Realism"' (1960), in *Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, The Homecoming: A Casebook*, ed. by Michael Scott, p. 118.

¹⁰ written but discarded before *The Caretaker*, produced in 1980.

as diverse as David Storey and Howard Barker. In 1978, Pinter's *Betrayal* was seen as a crisis: 'Yet the play is a definite departure for Pinter. Gone are the carefully formed innuendoes, the sinister ambiguities, the impending disasters'.¹¹ After this, his mature plays of the 1980 and 1990s received hostile criticism, especially when *One for the Road* in 1980 represented a greater break with his previous work. The critics failed to see that his plays represented his political involvement (both internationally and as an opponent of Thatcherism) and his interest in wider social issues.

Pinter concentrated heavily on cinema after *No Man's Land*; he experimented and surveyed different subjects and explored notions of self-consciousness. He looked at other people's works to enrich ways to reflect his main concerns and re-explore his own roots. But critics and academics marked this period as Pinter's end as a writer, a setback in his career: he was a second Stanley who had nothing to say. Nevertheless, films gave an overview that supported and reflected his political concerns. His film-scripts fitted in very well with what Pinter was trying to achieve, for films are more public work than plays.¹² And also Pinter insisted that the film adaptations were 'acts of the imagination on [his] part'.¹³ The film work and the absence of a full-length play in the fifteen-year period between *Betrayal* and *Moonlight* were regarded as symptoms of 'writer's block'. In fact, however, this period was penetrating and acute. It was the period in which Pinter, the withdrawn artist of the 1960s and 1970s, revolutionised his privacy and remodelled his use of theatre into a more public activity, when Pinter the

¹¹ Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*: The Patterns of Banality', *Modern Drama*, 23(1980-81), pp. 227-37 (p. 227).

¹² The market for the three films that will be analysed in this study shows that Pinter was presenting his work to a different audience each time in order to broaden his public worldwide: *Reunion* is a European co-production which had a very limited release, *The Comfort of Strangers* is an 'American' film, *The Trial* is a BBC film for cinema and TV.

¹³ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 100.

playwright became a critic of Western democracies, and when his new political works functioned as agents of history.

Despite the assumptions of mainstream Pinter criticism, the period between *Betrayal* (1978) and *Moonlight* (1993) marked a revolution in Pinter's career. This was also the time when he transformed his image, which had been framed by the idea of the 'Pinteresque'. The 'Pinteresque' is often interpreted as pauses, enigmas and menace. The word, which implies the use of silences, vague dialogues, memory games and menacing outsiders, has passed into everyday language. Pinter does not approve of the image. He believes that 'Harold Pinter' sits on his back, and he is 'someone else's creation'.¹⁴ Pinter has succeeded in dissolving that image with his political plays. Critics who could not fit Pinter's political plays into the 'Pinteresque' image dismissed them. They preferred to label this period as, essentially, one of 'writer's block' because of their own inability to accept Pinter's political arguments and because of their incapacity and reluctance to see Pinter from outside the 'Pinteresque' image. And yet when Pinter seemed to abandon politics in *Moonlight* (1993), critics were back to influence their readers to join in a tired scepticism. Ghilardi-Santacatterina and Sierz argued that Pinter is 'a victim of his own image'.¹⁵ Contrarily, he is both intuitive and intellectual, and more intentional than is generally recognised.

Critics wrote a great deal about Pinter's alleged creative constipation: 'Why Doesn't He Write More',¹⁶ 'Plot there is none'.¹⁷ He wrote fewer plays; but, instead, he created

¹⁴ Ibid., December 1971, p. 25.

¹⁵ Maria Ghilardi-Santacatterina and Aleks Sierz, 'Pinter and the Pinteresque: An Author Trapped by his Own Image', in *Drama on Drama*, ed. by Nicole Boireau (Macmillan Press: London, 1997), pp. 108-20 (p. 112).

¹⁶ Patricia Bosworth, 'Why Doesn't He Write More', *New York Times*, 27 October 1968, sec. V, p. 3.

¹⁷ Cited in John Bush Jones, 'Stasis as a Structure in Pinter's *No Man's Land*', *Modern Drama* 19(1976), pp. 291-304 (p. 296).

several adaptations for the screen,¹⁸ and it is wrong to dismiss this as a second-class activity. He was participating actively in questions of human rights, censorship, and the United States' foreign policy in Central America. In 1980, he founded the June 20 Group for intellectual sceptics to discuss the plight of Thatcher's Britain. During that time, *Betrayal* (1978) and *One for the Road* (1984) were his only full-length plays. The previously 'non-political' Pinter now openly admitted the importance of the social forces that govern our lives.¹⁹ His creative work was 'about' tyranny abroad, but also about injustices at home and the ways Britain seemed to be changing morally.

The different genres, and the miscellaneous writings for different media, prove Pinter's expertise in 'various voices'. His output explores the depth of the human condition in the space of the twentieth century; it is a set of sketches portraying 'Western Civilisation' - the developed capitalist world - in decline. He has, perhaps, become the only leading English playwright to imagine the world from the viewpoint of colonised peoples rather than from a Western perspective, and has shown the power to understand and share the other's vision of the world. He is at one with the theorists of Post-colonial discourse. He has updated the term 'imperialism' to establish that it 'remains an active and vibrant force in the world today, through the vehicle of financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; imperialism is in a position to dictate policy to smaller states which rely on their credit.'²⁰

¹⁸ Pinter's screen adaptations include *The Servant* (1963), *The Pumpkin Eater* (1963), *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966), *Accident* (1966), *The Go-Between* (1969), *The Proust Screenplay* (1972), *Langrishe, Go Down* (1970), *The Last Tycoon* (1976), *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), *Victory* (1982), *Turtle Diary* (1985), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1987), *The Heat of the Day* (1988), *Reunion* (1989), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990), *The Trial* (1990).

¹⁹ At the British Council Conference, Pinter admitted that he knew his early plays were political, but he actually lied that they were not.

²⁰ Pinter, 'Nato Action in Serbia'.

In 1985, Pinter discussed the reception of his new agenda with his publisher Nicholas Hern, and he talked satirically about becoming ‘an exhibitionist, self-important, pompous. [...] Before you know where you are you’re having make-up put on, your eyelashes are being tinted’. Critics regarded Pinter’s politically engaging plays as a revolutionary new direction - in Hern’s summary ‘a sudden crystallisation of his political sensibility’ - and were generally baffled and hostile. However, Pinter pointed out that the critics had regarded his earlier work as ‘rubbish’ too - ‘absurd rubbish’.²¹ For example, John McGrath had condemned Pinter for an indulgence in absurdity, mystery and enigma - ‘the significant failure to say anything significant’.²² But in a real sense, from the beginning, his texts have been defining an inescapable sense of pessimism and alienation in the contemporary world, and though the perspective has altered, the vision had not. For example, his unpublished early prose work written in 1949, *The Queen of all Fairies*, introduced his embryonically present political attitudes.²³ This is an autobiographical piece in which Pinter writes about his family, his friends and the Jewish population in Hackney:

The Fascists did not come into it, though, forcibly, one night I remember a cry in the sudden hustling - ‘They’ve sorted out Harold.’ Jimmy flinging out his arms and charging. A nightmare of coshes and stupid faces. And me almost ruined, busted in the crutch. [...] ‘Why don’t you join the Communists, or the 43 group?’, I was asked. I had to laugh. It was all such dross. Causes, banners and speeches. If they squashed me, then that was that. I would be free till then. The effect of the whole business was to give me ‘pernicious aggravation in the cobblers.’ I didn’t give the monkey’s toss.

²¹ Nicholas Hern, ‘A Play and Its Politics’, *One for the Road* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 7-23 (p. 19). (When Hern’s employers Methuen were taken over by a multinational company, Pinter moved in protest to Faber).

²² John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 84.

²³ Pinter, *The Queen of All Fairies*.

Towards the end of *The Queen of All Fairies*, Pinter explained what happened to his friends:

Moishe became a soldier in Germany. [...] Ron disappeared, bearing his cross to the stock-exchange. Henry loved and was loved. Jimmy took to the Café Torino in Old Compton Street, read Sartre and La Fargue.

As for himself he wrote:

I, as a conchie [conscientious objector]²⁴, did not go to prison, but counted myself a king of infinite space, while as an actor, I trod the boards. [...] We see them coming, the barbarians.

In 1999, Pinter's participation in a Cambridge Conference, organised by the British Council, made the fact clear once more that he had always been critical of the operations of the state machinery, and the ideological underpinnings of the authoritarian state, as another example of ideology's ability to mystify/abstract its own operations. As he read and acted scenes from a selection of his plays, and especially when he delivered Stanley's line, 'They carved me up' with wholehearted malevolence, he deliberately stressed the political power of language. Pinter has continuously been a conscientious objector in the widest sense, even in his 'comedies of menace', the 'absurd' and 'mysterious' early work. His plays are constantly being generalised as filled with 'mystery'. But this was a conscious strategy, set out in his early novel, *The Dwarfs*, where Len says:

Mysteries are always new mysteries, I've decided that. So, you see, I am alive and not a storehouse of dead advice and formulas of how to live. And won't be. But I have to be silent, like the guilty. (*The Dwarfs*, p. 94).

²⁴ See Susan Hollis Merritt's explanation in her article on 'The Harold Pinter Archive in the British Library', *Pinter Review: Annual Essays*, 1994, pp. 14-55 (p. 29).

For many years, Pinter was determined not to fall into the trap of offering 'dead advice'. Increasingly, however, he became convinced that it was his duty to name 'the guilty'. Pinter broke his 'silence' with *One for the Road*, and the 'directness' of his political views was obvious from then on.

Despite the clear political statements, he was still concerned with time, memory, sexuality, loss, separation and solitude. However, the major difference in the political texts is the depiction of the *destruction* of memory and sexuality. While the earlier plays were about the opposite gender linguistic acts of the isolated man and woman, in the political plays individual freedom is suppressed by established authority.

Pinter has announced himself as 'the king of infinite space', and this thesis explores Pinter's satirical 'celebration'²⁵ of space in an age 'dominated and dictated by cynicism, by self-promotion, profit and the whole damn thing'.²⁶ For many scholars, space in Pinter's work has involved distinct and limited interpretations of 'the room'. However, his earliest play *The Room* formulates, at the start, Pinter's idea of the room as symbolic space. It is not an ordinary room but a 'psychic space, a speck of consciousness cursed with a vivid awareness of its own significance and insecurity in a world ruled by forces outside itself'.²⁷ Thus, this study sets out to decode the strong sense of an environment *beyond* the room: the social space, which is described through communication, speech and memory. The urban underworld, the gyms, the butcher's shop, and the 'urinal' local swimming-baths in the sordid city of *The Homecoming*, the diegetic/narrated images of run-down, seedy London in *The Room*, *Night School*, *A*

²⁵ Pinter's most recent play, titled *Celebration*, satirically celebrates the national bourgeoisie - the political elite - who are responsible for political betrayal and deceit.

²⁶ Pinter at Cambridge Conference.

²⁷ Katherine Worth, 'Pinter's Scenic Imagery', *Pinter Review: Annual Essays*, 1:1(1987), pp. 31-39 (p. 32).

Night Out, The Black and White, Family Voices and *Victoria Station* - all this is stronger than the mimetic image of the visible room that locks the actors in. The offstage social space, which Pinter's characters describe through their speech, works as a tool for the analysis of society.²⁸ Similarly, the later political plays, which take place in rooms and prisons, dramatise the direct relationship of individuals to their unseen society.

This study explores Pinter's evocation of geographical space: 'City', 'Country' and the invisible 'Other Places'. The focus is on the post-1968 plays. Since then there has been a strong sense of Pinter's use of virtual and real, identifiable spaces as metaphors for gender consciousness. While the city will be explored by relating Pinter's writing to the theories of continental social analysts, to the theorists of the modernist city (Friedrich Engels, Walter Benjamin) and its poets (Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud), Pinter's 'country' will be discussed via Raymond Williams and Terry Gifford. The third section, 'Other Places', explores a political no-man's-land using Pinter's own theories - Pinter the political humanist, Pinter the pacifist - as well as Post-colonial discourse; his work is of direct relevance to that of Post-colonial theorists and thinkers, for all its differences. Pinter was a self-consciously modernist - and then post-modern - writer adapting mainstream literary and theoretical traditions for his own purposes. The aim of this study is to explore Pinter's reworking of the modernist notions of the city, and classical images of the pastoral, and the relationships in his works between locality, language and gender.

²⁸ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), first published in 1974.

Starting with his earlier work, such as *The Caretaker*, Pinter has been writing about urban decay, loss of work, dispossession. He draws different types of characters who are the outcome of urban life: from the gregarious 'successful' Londoners to the homeless. The opening chapters of this study articulate the ways in which Pinter's men invade space, and the various ways men emotionally or physically try to take over, but fail to possess women. In *Landscape, Silence, Old Times, No Man's Land, Betrayal, Family Voices* and *Victoria Station* the city is male-constructed and is explored through male discourse. On the other hand the pastoral/country is evoked as an area of potential content through female discourse. While the city expresses and heightens male insecurity, Pinter uses a lyrical language to celebrate the impulse of retreat and return, the feminine self, eroticism and freedom, that is 'the country'.

'Other Places' covers the political work of the 1980s and early 1990s: *Precisely, The New World Order, One for the Road, Mountain Language* and *Party Time* are all about political schizophrenia and social repression in the contemporary world. The city is still male-constructed but this time it is a no man's land, politically taken over and hostile to all those, male or female, who will not integrate themselves into a regime which strangely empowers yet denies their own individuality. The unconquerable psychic spaces of the earlier plays now become brutally breached, and memory and sexuality are destroyed. The political plays also show the characters' private fantasy worlds ('abroad') as a massive and historically important objective reality. Now space is unspecified, deliberately unlocalised; it is global, because Pinter does not want to reduce the plays' meaning to certain countries, but rather he interrogates borders and boundaries in an alarming, vast, incomprehensible world. On the other hand, his plays make the actuality of this no man's land British and bourgeois. Pinter portrays virtual

geographies, imaginative perceptions in his plays, and tangible, utopian and dystopian landscapes in his film-scripts: Stuttgart in Nazi Germany (*Reunion*), Venice (*The Comfort of Strangers*), Prague (*The Trial*). Like his political plays, the film-scripts analysed in this study examine 'the purification of society' - the harrowing and relentless consequences of the rhetoric of patriarchy, and patriotism. As his political convictions informed his whole output during the 1980s and 1990s, the foreign 'worlds', 'realities', imaginations and 'other' cultures in these screenplays work as metaphors for Thatcher's Britain.

The penultimate chapter analyses *Moonlight* (1993) as an interval from politics where Pinter evokes his own private anguish, and death as a new horizon. This time it is not geography but emotional reality that determines the human landscape.

The thesis ends with *Ashes to Ashes* (1996). Here, finally, is a metaphor of place where Pinter negotiates the rubble heap of history. In this play Pinter's journey leads him to the delight of discovering courage and the ability to resist authority through his heroine, Rebecca. However, on the one hand, Rebecca tries to resist, while on the other she is submissive. By ending this remarkable play with his heroine's self-denial, Pinter emphasises his abiding anxiety about the dangerous silence that is self-censorship: 'Censorship is all over the place, and self-censorship. That's when it becomes insidious'.²⁹ So Rebecca, both, stands for resistance and for the self-censorship that Pinter holds up to criticism. Through his drama Pinter calls for an urgency to stop self-censorship and invert the 'instituted', 'abstracted' realities that are

²⁹ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1988, p. 76.

the outcome of power games. Intellectually, Pinter is finally a pessimist, but the optimism of his will feeds his work.

This thesis would not be complete if it did not emphasise Pinter's poetry. The origins of the lyrical pulsation of his plays lie in his underrated but powerful poetry. Having twice been privileged to hear Pinter's own readings from his plays and poems, I have had to come to terms with the threatening, terror-ridden power of the poetic rhythm of his language.³⁰ More importantly, his sculpting of spaces and his carving of inner landscapes is rooted in his access to poetic speech. The American poet Wallace Stevens's lines are relevant to Pinter's formulation of a network of poetry, imagination, and theatre:

Of Modern Poetry³¹

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
It has to face the men of the time and to meet
The women of the time. It has to think about war
And it has to find what will suffice. It has
To construct a new stage. ... The actor is
A metaphysician in the dark.

³⁰ Harold Pinter read from his *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948 – 1998* in the Lyttelton Theatre on 23 November 1998. He read from his plays at The British Council Cambridge Conference on 13 July 1999.

³¹ Wallace Stevens, *Of Modern Poetry*, in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), pp. 239-40.

Similarly, in *Silence*, Bates asks himself, 'What can be meant by living in the dark?' There is silence, chaos, and isolation in the dark: a romanticised framing of twentieth century chaos that, in the hands of a poet-playwright, has found an impressive voice and a cultivated visuality. As opposed to other literary figures of our age such as Eliot and Beckett, who wrote of the banality of corruption, Pinter romanticises the very same corruption and pursues and formulates the poetics of terror in our space and time, holding up many contemporary issues (rationalism, nationalism, democracy, masculinism) to irony, criticism and mockery, simultaneously celebrating and disturbing them.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORY & CITY V COUNTRY

Theatrical Space: Mimetic and Diegetic Spaces

Theatre is the only literary art form that can display space concretely as well as linguistically and virtually. The space in theatre is both actualised and indeterminate. While fictional or poetic space can only be mediated through verbal channelling, representing physical space is a unique element of drama. Michael Issacharoff draws a fundamental distinction between 'space on stage and space off stage', between 'what is shown to an audience and what is not'. In particular, he argues that dramatic *anxiety* is often conditional to the relationship between the visible space represented and the invisible space described. He describes how 'mimetic space' is transmitted directly, whereas 'diegetic space' is communicated verbally and not visually. The distinction between Issacharoff's terms (*mimetic* and *diegetic*), recalls their ancient origins: Plato's *diegesis* and *mimesis*: telling and showing.³² Issacharoff argues that 'when dramatic discourse refers to non-visible (diegetic) space, its function is to replace space verbally.'³³ In the core of Harold Pinter's work, the plays' imaginative perceptions and diegetic fields embody virtual spaces through language. Thus, the characters locate urban and pastoral places - what is beyond the stage - in the constructed site of the diegetic.

In Pinter's post-1968 plays, local and specific reference is kept to a minimum. In his drama, conventional mimesis/physical action is, after the earlier plays, diminished, and diegetic space, the space of speech, comes to arrest its primacy, to usurp the stage

³² See Francis MacDonald Cornford, *The Republic of Plato*, 'The Influence of Dramatic Recitation, in Book 3, pp.78-83 (Oxford: 1941). For a definition of 'mimesis' see also, Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988), pp. 52-53.

³³ Michael Issacharoff, 'Space and Reference in Drama', *Poetics Today*, 2.3(1981), pp. 211-24 (p. 214).

space. Of course, there is no single diegetic space; each character has their own diegetic space that alters during the play. However, there are times in a performance when the mimetic and the diegetic can occur simultaneously and when there are no clear-cut distinctions between the two. For example, Trevor Nunn's, 1998, production of *Betrayal*, in the Lyttelton Theatre, was based on the systematic manipulation of the mimetic. As Emma and Jerry sat in the pub at the opening of the play, outside space, which surrounded the pub, acted as an extension of the mimetic. The outside was transported into the mimetic through sound: noise of buses, horns and trains. The auditory and the visual space invaded the inner, mimetic space. With the help of cinematic and aural effect, the stage manipulates definitions of the mimetic and the diegetic towards the goal of intermingling the two. On the other hand, radio – equally important for Pinter at many stages of his career – presumes an elimination of the visual, which can be regarded as non-mimetic. Issacharoff refers to the space in radio plays as 'auditory mimetic space'.³⁴ Like stage plays, radio plays communicate the diegetic through the verbal medium.

Hanna Scolcinov has a similar approach to theatrical space. 'The physical space in which performance takes place is its *theatre space*, the production will create its own *theatrical space*'.³⁵ Like Issacharoff, Scolcinov makes a distinction between the visible acting area and the unseen theatrical space. She remarks that 'Every performance defines its own boundaries in relation to its own space-time structure.'³⁶ The space in a play can be delimited through the language of the characters, movement and gesture,

³⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

³⁵ Hanna Scolcinov, 'Theatre Space, Theatrical Space, and the Theatrical Space Without', *Themes in Drama* (9) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

and with the aid of props, scenery, lighting and acoustics: 'In that space alone their play has physical extension.'³⁷

Having identified the physical theatrical space, Scolcinov then describes the unseen space extending 'beyond the limits of the visible acting area', which Issacharoff describes as diegetic. The difference between the visible and the unseen is the difference between perceived space and conceived space. Scolcinov emphasises that the theatrical space is a delimited space, a magic circle marked off from the mundane and ordinary. Again, the relevance to Pinter's dramatic practice is strong, as Scolcinov appreciated. Pinter has delimited the visual theatrical space into a room: 'Harold Pinter chose to call his dramatic debut simply *The Room*. He sees in the room a basic unit of space, within which skeletal situations can be developed.'³⁸ Pinter creates a theatrical space that is generally regarded as 'minimalistic and conceptual'. 'He strips off characterisation, plot, and cultural and historical setting, in order to reveal the impassionate outline, the basic structure of the theatrical event. This is similar to reducing a holy icon to a set of geometrical shapes.'³⁹ However, while the action of the play is limited to one place, many diegetic references to other places refer to a *virtual geography*. The streets and public places of London embody Pinter's London as a particular fictional urban society, together with the various landscapes of Britain and 'other' urban and pastoral environments in foreign places, discovering notions of sublimity and awe.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

Several of Pinter's plays, for example *Landscape* and *Silence*, are 'non-mimetic theatre'. The characters in *Landscape* and in *Silence* become disconnected from the physical world. They physically exist on-stage but their consciousness is indifferent to their mimetic surroundings; instead they inhabit an imaginary world which only exists in linguistic geography. These plays have limited physical space. In *Landscape*, the physical theatrical space refers to a kitchen in which the characters are confined to their chairs: to remember, to imagine, to play, to narrate what dwarfs them and what exults them. *Silence*, indeed, has a nonmaterial space. Its theatrical locale cannot be identified. Each character exists in relation to a chair, which confines him or her. These plays are simpler in terms of their demands on theatrical space. They are almost completely diegetic and the places in characters' speeches are mediated through narrative space: 'It is impossible to separate the image of theatrical space from the image of character.'⁴⁰ In these plays, the image of the bodiless theatrical space implants the characters into the incorporeal diegetic spaces of their minds. *Landscape* and *Silence* are a vivid picture of chair-bound stasis and spatial isolation, a metaphor for a terrifying existential human alienation. Like the characters in Beckett's *Play*, the cast can neither touch nor see nor hear one another (except in the scenes where they re-enact previous happenings in *Silence*). Locked away from each other in separate streams of thought, they are nevertheless edgily dependent on each other. Unlike in *Play*, but perhaps like in Sartre's *Huis Clos*, in which Pinter performed for the BBC in the 1960s, each of these characters needs the others as an imprisoned audience for their stories and questions. The characters can be, both, *dramatis personae* and actors reciting a poem and playing roles. The constructed world of the plays implies a distant world beyond,

⁴⁰ Charles R. Lyons, 'Character and Theatrical Space', *Themes in Drama* (9), pp. 27-44 (p. 28).

strongly affecting the lives of the characters despite their constant refusal to face reality.

Stanley Vincent Longman identifies a difference between the spaces of stage and screen: 'Of necessity, the stage is a confined space'; the screen is a confined space, too, but 'the confinement is variable and shifts with the camera.'⁴¹ The stage is delimited materially, but refers to other spaces in the diegetic. As Longman points out, the stage is expected to stand for more than itself. It is a literal, physically confined area and at the same time 'an imagined realm.'⁴² In *Landscape, Silence, Family Voices, A Kind of Alaska* and *Ashes to Ashes* the action occurs within a closed space, which remains the same throughout and is called 'fixed stage.'⁴³ At the opposite extreme, particularly as in *Betrayal, Old Times, No Man's Land*, and *Moonlight*, the characters overcome the confines of the stage; they shift the virtual world of the play on and off stage, and make the stage a constantly changing place, which Longman calls 'fluid stage'. Pinter uses the stage as a cause for celebration or for despair; his characters offer documentary evidence of social dislocation, corruption, and alienation through their imaginative perceptions, but at times they recognise the excitement and richness that their lives can offer.

How does Pinter use these comparative forms of theatrical space? *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, and *The Homecoming* use local reference to a great deal. On the other hand, starting with *Landscape* Pinter keeps local reference to a minimum. From 1968

⁴¹ Stanley Vincent Longman, 'Fixed, Floating and Fluid Stages', *Themes in Drama* (9), pp. 151-60 (p. 151).

⁴² Ibid., p. 151.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 152.

onwards, Pinter's audiences seem to be looking at a mind rather than a room, watching the mimetic scene overlaid with images of the diegetic. Each character creates his or her own mental space. They are no longer locked in their mimetic rooms; instead, they explore the diegetic space, the space of speech, treating locations not geographically but mentally. And his later political plays show that there is a transformation from diegetic to mimetic. In these plays, the space refers to much larger worlds, stripped of any borders and boundaries, as the linguistic geographies of *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* and *Party Time* refer to an indistinct magnitude of scale. The global and universal space stands for a 'realistic' vision of the decay of institutions and the death of individuality. Here Pinter manipulates the shifting planes of reality to shocking effect: to provoke, attack and arrest the attention of the spectators, forcing them to question the stability of their own world - the world outside the theatre. He uses the stage powerfully to enact existence, routine, and human relationships, both in Britain and abroad. Pinter plays on the distinction between repressing the theatre experience and the need to use this experience to end an authority that transforms society into a prison. As a result, the 'metaphorically' political world of the early plays is transformed, in the later political dramas, into 'realistically' universal, vast settings. For example, the off-stage locale of *The Birthday Party*, - as Stanley is deprived of his individuality and of his ability to speak - or Aston's awful, off-stage medical treatment in *The Caretaker*, are challenged by the directness of his political plays of the 1980s, in which the atrocities, the terror are no longer diegetic/offstage but mimetic/onstage. Pinter looks 'realistically' at people's lives. In his plays, his characters *describe* the alien places of their dreams - and film becomes especially valuable to him, through which he can *show* places and explore what terrifies and awes people in their private landscapes.

After this brief description of the mechanics of theatrical space, the following section will contextualise 'space' via intellectual and philosophical/epistemological theories. There are significant parallels and common features between the analytical observations of social scientists, theorists, and the poetic perceptions of Pinter - a producer of literary imagination, a practising artist.

The Production of Space: Lefebvre

In his *Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre examines the question: 'To what extent may *a* space be read or decoded?'⁴⁴ Lefebvre searches for a reconciliation between mental space (the space of the philosophers) and real space (the physical and social spheres in which we all live). In the course of his exploration, he moves from metaphysical and ideological considerations of the meaning of space to its experience in the everyday life of home and city. As opposed to the physical space that is conceptualised by scientists and mathematicians, space 'became what Leonardo da Vinci had called a "mental thing"'.⁴⁵

Pinter's first play, *The Room*, epitomises the mimetic space of his dramatic work. The room, however, has a symbolic and metaphorical meaning. The spatial analysis of his plays and film-scripts focuses on the environment *beyond* 'the room', which portrays a 'social space'. Social space for Lefebvre 'works (along with its concept) as a tool for the analysis of society', which is a central aim for Pinter, too.⁴⁶ Lefebvre draws a

⁴⁴ Lefebvre, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

correlation between space and language, which is again of primary importance for Pinter:

Perhaps what have to be uncovered are as-yet concealed relations between space and language: perhaps the “logicalness” intrinsic to articulated language operated from the start as a spatiality capable of bringing order to the qualitative chaos (the practico-sensory realm) presented by the perception of things.⁴⁷

In Pinter’s political plays and film-scripts, the space becomes universally oppressive, destroying humanity, showing an irresistible horror in a decaying modern world. As Lefebvre explains ‘the bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space is everywhere.’⁴⁸

Lefebvre has made it clear that the absence of a criticism of space is simply the result of a lack of an appropriate terminology.⁴⁹ This might also explain the reason why Pinter’s treatment of space has not been studied by scholars as much as his treatment of language and time. Therefore, the following section will set out some terminology of space via the critical and historical processes: the social theories of Friedrich Engels, Walter Benjamin and his reading of Baudelaire, the poet Rimbaud, the great British commentator/theorist Raymond Williams and the critic Terry Gifford. The aim is to explore the linguistic geography and the mythical representations of city and country in Pinter’s work.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁹ Lefebvre argues that to suggest a need for ‘critique of space’ is to seem paradoxical or even intellectually outrageous, as one normally criticises a person or a thing - and space is neither. In philosophical terms, space is inaccessible because it is neither subject nor object. He blames the so-called critical spirit, for a lack of architectural or urbanistic criticism on a par with the criticism of art, literature, music and theatre.

THE CITY

In Pinter's early plays, the obvious concern is with domestic spaces; their violation or transformation is his major image of the threat to the self. From the domestic spaces, Pinter gradually evolves into mythical representations of the city, country, foreign worlds, and spaces of the psyche. As one of his earlier poems (1952) already emphasises, he investigates 'An echoed Siberia in the mind'.⁵⁰

Location and dislocation are central to Pinter's characters, who are involved in a power game of place. The characters' ability to create virtual geographies is important for their survival in the fatal games they play. Someone gains or loses territory figuratively and literally in the course of competition. Pinter's space remains largely ungrounded. Some plays are dominated by existential and some by realist space.

The claustrophobic rooms lack clues to help the spectator identify the place chronologically or geographically, yet this very lack of specific referential information permits an imaginative approach to space, which is rooted in the relationship between space and language. This relationship creates a personal narrative/diegetic space for every character. The characters' linguistic territories refer to urban and pastoral locations as well as to bodiless spaces. In some plays it is the city, in others the pastoral that is celebrated.

⁵⁰ Pinter, 'The Second Visit' in *Various Voices*, p. 128.

In his well-known 1970 Hamburg speech, Pinter said of his plays: 'I know the plays, but in a totally different way, in a quite private way.'⁵¹ Epistemological theories and analytic observations of the city-country dialectic provide valuable insight into the understanding of Pinter's 'private way'. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that like the social scientists, Pinter, as a creative writer, has tended more and more to put his stories' plots into an ideological discourse dealing with the social problems of the time.

While many studies have focused on the theme of urbanisation and of the representation of the metropolis in the novel and in poetry, little attention has been paid to drama.⁵² Although the real city is not seen, the stage proves to be an effective vehicle for presenting the city in the characters' minds. The city creates its own reality when textualised through Pinter's characters' narratives. And the theories will provide the vocabulary to explore Pinter's cities of the mind.

We need to locate Pinter within the context of modernism, a tradition of which - as we shall see - he has been passionately aware.⁵³ The city in Pinter's work will be analysed via a vocabulary adapted from the analytic observations of social theorists (Engels and

⁵¹ A speech made by Harold Pinter in Hamburg, on being awarded the 1970 German Shakespeare Prize. Cited as the Introduction to *Pinter: Plays Four* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. x.

⁵² For example, Balzac's and Dickens's urban fiction establishes 'the city as landscape, lying either desolately or seductively open before the fictional characters, and the city as a room enclosing them either protectively or oppressively; the city as familiar, as knowable and known, and the city as mysteriously alien and fantastic.' See John Rignall, 'Benjamin's *Flâneur* and Poe's "*Man in the Crowd*"', in *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-19 (p. 11).

⁵³ These analysts, used in this empirical chapter, are a part of the cultural production, in the first world European countries, called MODERNISM. The vocabulary they provide gives an insight into suggesting an alternative reading of Pinter's plays. However, it would be wrong to suggest that Pinter belongs to any of these traditions, as he defines 'tradition' as being 'shitstained strictures of centuries' (Pinter's 1958 letter to Peter Wood, director of *The Birthday Party*, 'On *The Birthday Party*', in *Various Voices*, p. 11). It would not be accurate to limit, finalise or totalise the plays' meanings through these terms only.

Benjamin) and from the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud. These social critics and poets described the bustle of the city long before Pinter; however, their terminology helps explore Pinter's cities of the mind. The city will be explored as a text, as an 'object', through three kinds of subject - Baudelaire's *flâneur*/passer-by', Engels's 'investigator', and Rimbaud's 'visitor/spectator'. These three kinds of subject fit very well into exploring Pinter and his characters. The city in Pinter's memory plays of the 1970s will be analysed through Baudelaire's figure of the *flâneur*, who engages directly with the reality of metropolitan life; the city of Pinter's political plays of the 1980s will be examined via Engels's 'investigator'; and in the final section (*Ashes to Ashes*), the city will be explored through Rimbaud's 'visitor/spectator'. While the memory plays tend to establish Pinter's poetic artistry through the *flâneur*-poet of the Baudelairean-Benjaminian social phantasmagoria, the political plays explore Pinter as an investigator, an analytic observer. And the final section explores Pinter as an objective 'spectator'. The aim is to explore Pinter the playwright as a social critic; and to insist that Pinter has not been writing in a vacuum, as his so-called 'Pinteresque', 'absurd', 'mysterious' plays may have suggested, according to scholars and critics. Similarly, Pinter himself said, 'I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance'⁵⁴.

In Blanchard's words, 'The city is potentially an enormous narrative awaiting its narrator, its translator.'⁵⁵ This thesis uses three different critical techniques - Baudelaire's *flâneur*, Engels' investigator, and Rimbaud's spectator - to translate

⁵⁴ Pinter, 'Writing for Myself', Introduction to *Plays 2*, pp. 9-12, based on a conversation with Richard Findlater published in *The Twentieth Century*, February 1961.

⁵⁵ Marc Eli Blanchard, *In Search of the City: Engels, Baudelaire, Rimbaud* (Calif: Anna Libri, 1985), p. 12.

Pinter's city. As Pinter's evolution (his metamorphosis in each decade of his writing career) seems to be adopting/matching these three different modes of writing, his work seems of direct relevance to that of these figures of modernity. Pinter's journey from '*flâneur*' through 'investigator' to 'spectator' works as a melting pot, synthesising the three different perspectives. Like these social critics and poets, Pinter has been 'through the prism of the poet writing the journal of his experiences',⁵⁶ exploring the global city as the locus of existential alienation and as the centre of political power and oppression, and of social dislocation.

a- *Flâneur*/Passer-by: Baudelaire-Benjamin

Benjamin presents the *flâneur* as a representative product of urban life in whom the joy of watching is triumphant.⁵⁷ He sees the city as 'now landscape, now a room'.⁵⁸ The *flâneur* needs to make the alien, urban world familiar to himself: 'The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the facades of the houses as a citizen is in his four walls'.⁵⁹ The *flâneur* wants to associate himself with the anonymous crowd; he attempts to produce a bearable existence for himself in the city. He seeks meanings of sublimity and wonder through perceptions, dreams and fantasies.

For Benjamin, the city is both beautiful and bestial, destroying humanity, its own creator; it is magnetic. The concept of the urban complex as a maze and the desire to lose oneself within it are the most important motifs in Benjamin's writings on the city.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The *Flâneur*', in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 35-66 (p. 63).

⁵⁸ Benjamin, 'Baudelaire or the Streets of Paris', in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, pp. 170-72 (p. 170).

⁵⁹ Benjamin, 'The *Flâneur*', p. 37.

With Baudelaire, the city became the subject of 'lyrical poetry'⁶⁰ narrated by an emotional and highly personal interpreter: the *flâneur*. His gaze offers 'a conciliatory gleam over the growing destitution of men in the great city'.⁶¹ Baudelaire argues that the city is never real. It is more like 'a series of pictures, of vignettes, made to be read by everyone in his own way'.⁶² So the city becomes 'a stage, a spectacle' for the *flâneur*.⁶³

Like the *flâneur*, a Pinter character seeks his/her home in the crowd; he or she celebrates/cherishes the city, recognises the excitement and richness that city life can offer. At the same time the city appears as a place of disturbance, terror, isolation - where the protagonist is led to an unpleasant end.

Pinter often peoples his cities with displaced figures, wandering outsiders, but more than that, he himself functions as the *flâneur* - a figure who, in *Landscape*, *Silence*, *Old Times*, *No Man's Land*, *Betrayal*, *Family Voices* and *Victoria Station*, surveys the self-estranged city that is modern consciousness, and records phantom images. These diegetic representations are usually part of the characters' memories, narrated to locate or dislocate other characters. Each character has his or her own, recorded, phantom images. Paradoxically, Pinter objectifies the city through his characters' memories. He studies the relationship between, the city as geographical entity and the city as attitude of mind; it is entirely a subjective experience for each character, for whom there begins

⁶⁰ Benjamin, 'Baudelaire and the Streets of Paris', p. 170.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Blanchard, p. 74.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 77

the myth and the dream of the city. In the mind of each character there is a different narrative; its structure, its plots are unreachable by the others.

b- Investigator: Engels

Engels's 'investigator' perceives the city in a contrary fashion. While the *flâneur* associates himself with the city and carves out a bearable existence for himself, the eye of the curious 'investigator' identifies the ills of the city as a result of capitalism.⁶⁴ Engels writes of the inhuman character of the great city. He piles misery upon misery in his descriptions; he assigns a negative charge to the 'investigator' that he hopes will enable him, in the end, 'to reverse the process of historical decomposition of the city'⁶⁵:

After roaming the streets of the capital a day or two, making headway with difficulty through the human turmoil and the endless line of vehicles, after visiting the slums of the metropolis, one realises for the first time that these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilisation which crowd their city. [...] The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? [...] The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space.⁶⁶

Engels expresses his contempt; he has had 'enough'. The city is 'perceived as both the depositor of a frozen, historic past and the locus of unlimited, nauseating present

⁶⁴ See Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England and Great Towns* (London: Penguin, 1987), p 67.

⁶⁵ Blanchard, p. 64.

⁶⁶ Engels, *The Condition*, pp. 68-69.

(“Enough”)⁶⁷ The city in Pinter’s political plays is explored through Pinter’s analysis as an investigator who is very similar to Engels’s.

In his political work, Pinter portrays the city as an extension of his own experience, with facts, figures and documentary evidences that he has identified through his public involvement. His political articles are the product of his own investigation, and particularly his own experience in the metropolis. In order to expose the plot behind the literary text/play, he constructs a narrative about the city. The link between the personal and the critical, the plays and fact-finding through them, has been the most efficient medium for Pinter’s political analysis. Through a combination of dramatic art and mixing political activism and analytic observation (e.g. the use of statistics in *Precisely*), he is committed to showing the middle class what it will not or cannot see. Similarly, Pinter reaffirmed his role not only ‘as an actor and entertainer’ but also as ‘a citizen of the world in which I live, [and I] insist upon taking responsibility...to actually find out what the truth is and what actually is happening,...to [investigate] the blanket of lies which unfortunately we are either too indifferent or too frightened to question.’⁶⁸

c - Spectator/Visitor: Rimbaud

Rimbaud’s spectator/visitor challenges both investigator and *flâneur*. He remains a spectator. While Engel’s investigator looks for change through rational understanding, and Baudelaire’s *flâneur* aims at satisfaction in the fictionalisation of daily life,

⁶⁷ Blanchard, p. 65.

⁶⁸ Lois Gordon, ‘Harold Pinter in New York’, in *Harold Pinter: A Casebook*, ed. by Lois Gordon (London: Grand Publishing, 1990), pp. 215-22 (pp. 218-19), originally published in *The Pinter Review* III (1989). (This program took place in New York, on 3 October 1989, and consisted of Pinter’s reading and Gussow’s interview; Lois Gordon was one of the participants.)

Rimbaud's spectator offers meaning through a perception beyond the limits of reference, analogy and difference. Unconcerned with the specifics of one particular city, uninterested in an interpretation of its history, he prefers a 'global image of the *urbs*'.⁶⁹ With Rimbaud, there is neither Baudelaire's *association* nor Engels's *identification*. Rejecting any historical reference, he chooses to see the city-dwellers all as ghosts in the fog: 'From my window, I see new ghosts rolling through thick, everlasting coal smoke - our shadow in the woods, our summer night.'⁷⁰ He insists on total objectivity. He rejects defining and locating differences in the culture. As in Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, references to places become the context of another, imaginary culture. In that play, Pinter intermixes past and present, like Rimbaud, he erases all boundaries and distinctions between them in order to achieve 'a trans-historical view of the city'.⁷¹ Unlike the investigator, or the *flâneur*-poet, but like Rimbaud's spectator, Pinter's heroine watches from her window; she remains a spectator and narrates images from her memories/past that suggest current/present events. While his memory plays suggest the aesthetic, and his political plays suggest the oppressed miseries of city life, *Ashes to Ashes* rejects both subjective/imaginary perceptions and objective analysis in its portrait of the urban phenomenon. Pinter's heroine in this play refuses to become involved in plots to create reality. As her final self-denial suggests ('I have no baby'), she neither excludes herself from the context, nor includes herself in it. Finally rejecting the reference to a historical process, she decides to remain an uninvolved spectator to her memories.

⁶⁹ Blanchard, p. 117.

⁷⁰ Arthur Rimbaud, 'City', in *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. by Wallace Fowlie (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 239.

⁷¹ Blanchard, p. 126.

Pinter, through his heroine's spectatorship, holds up the contemporary issues - of self-denial, self-censorship, and indifference - to criticism. Like Rimbaud, Pinter's heroine takes advantage of her own posture as a visitor and a stranger; she refuses to get involved with her subject matter and pictures together the cities she knows and others she never saw.

Pinter's characters fantasise and fictionalise subjectively in his memory plays, and denounce hypocrisy through the analytic observations of an investigator in his political plays. But *Ashes to Ashes* presents the unique individuality of Pinter the dramatist as a fiction - and fictions, fantasies, memories and imaginations form an integral part of reality. *Ashes to Ashes* is written with a poetic perception where the past is produced by its contemporary heroine to show that only through a mingling of past and present can the city's historicity coincide and work with a contemporary audience's immediate existence. Like Rimbaud, Pinter rejects history in *Ashes to Ashes* to show that the past is not another country. Like Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and indeed Proust, Pinter looks backwards obsessively through the past for authentic being.

THE COUNTRY⁷²

Whether via the *flâneur's* association (Baudelaire), the investigator's identification (Engels), or the spectator's rejection of any association or identification (Rimbaud), the city has been the space of man's alienation in the social order. The social analyst (Pinter's contemporary) Raymond Williams analyses the division between country and city as symbolic of the need to create distinctions between nature and culture, natural

⁷² On the various pastoral traditions from Arcadia until the present, see Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999).

and social order. He reconstructs the story of man's alienation poetically. In *The Country and the City* (1975), Williams explored the city-country dialectic through his personal experiences and observations as a matter of social, literary and intellectual history. Through his memory plays of the 1970s, Pinter, on the other hand, creates a myth of his own, which apparently does not relate to his experiences, nor to any historical facts. However, Williams argues that 'Drama is always so central an element of the life of a society that a change in its methods cannot be isolated from much wider changes'.⁷³ And what Pinter has achieved, through his political work particularly, can indeed be read as a portrayal of the intellectual history of recent times, from which he drew a true picture of the end of the twentieth century. Like Williams, in the early and mid-1970s, Pinter, who was writing in and about an urban world, enriched the texture of his work with pastoral images. Despite their differences, Williams the social analyst and Pinter the practitioner - who portrays the subjective and apparently shapeless experiences of semi-anonymous characters in his plays - share an intense preoccupation with the relationship between country and city.

a - A Theatre of Retreat

Pinter's theatre introduces a linguistic scenery and creates a unique topographical genre through his characters' descriptions of imaginary landscapes. The plays have pastoral passages, dialogues and monologues that focus upon nature in contrast to the urban context. Because of the delight in the natural, these passages can be described as pastoral. The pastoral is, implicitly, 'carnavalesque', in Bakhtin's sense of playfully subverting what is currently taken for granted: the hegemony of the urban

⁷³ Raymond Williams, *Drama in Performance* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p. 171.

establishment.⁷⁴ In his recent study, Terry Gifford theorises three kinds of usage of the pastoral: as ‘the literary convention’, as ‘the literature of the countryside’, and as ‘the pejorative of idealisation’. The literary convention idealises the country and describes the charms of the English pastoral scene as developed by Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth. Some passages in Pinter’s memory plays evoke this tradition as they describe - with a celebratory attitude - an idyllic, ideal, charming English past through the characters’ memories, dreams and fantasies. Pinter’s female characters in the memory plays can generally be associated with this poetic landscape. By contrast, Pinter draws the antipathy of this idealisation through some of his male characters (Bates, Deeley). For most of his male characters the countryside is suffocating and gives them a sense of unease.

The pastoral in the memory plays will be analysed as ‘a theatre of retreat’. Because, although Pinter was aware of political and social atrocities in reality, in the late 1960s and the 1970s he temporarily drew away from this world into the more lyrical, phantasmal world of his drama.

In fact, as early as *The Dwarfs* (1952-1956), Pinter had balanced the *flâneur*/investigator/spectator of the city with the poet of the pastoral. Towards the end, after his description of a very brutal scene, Len retreats into a poetic area, a consoling pastoral:

pigbollocks, tincans, birdbrains, spare parts of all the little animals, a squelching squealing carpet, all the dwarfs’ leavings spittled in the muck, worms stuck in the poisoned shitheaps, the alleys a whirlpool of piss, slime, blood and fruitjuice.

⁷⁴ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 23.

Now all is bare. All is clean. All is scrubbed. There is a lawn. There is a shrub. There is a flower. (*The Dwarfs*, p. 183).

In *A Slight Ache* (1959), by contrast, a conventional country marriage is disrupted by the arrival of a mute outsider, a wretched tramp/*flâneur*, of the town. And in *Landscape* (1968), the pastoral is a realm lost forever. The heroine (Beth) is almost etherised. She sees the imaginary topography through the veil of the poetic melancholy of her memory. Raymond Williams suggests that the pastoral is 'an ordered and happier past set against the disturbance and disorder of the present'.⁷⁵ Beth in *Landscape*, Ellen and Rumsey in *Silence*, Kate in *Old Times* and Spooner and Hirst in *No Man's Land* all create narrative pastoral landscapes to defend themselves against the disorder of their present lives. These characters produce the escapist elements of the genre, and indulge in nostalgic dreams of a happier past. Pastoral is a backward-looking form and it represents an idealisation in many of the memory plays. The characters of *No Man's Land* stay in the safely comforting location of retreat - in their case in the literary countryside of mythic Old England, where stability and traditional values were located. However, Pinter mocks the elegiac lament for a lost age of innocence and tradition through his almost caricatured protagonists. And when he repeats *The Dwarfs'* device of stripping away their dominant mental landscape, he exposes a stark and terrifying wasteland behind the riverbanks and cricket pitches:

Do you ever examine the gullies of the English countryside? Under the twigs, under the dead leaves, you'll find tennis balls, blackened. Girls threw them for their dogs, or children, for each other, they rolled into the gully. They are lost there, given up for dead, centuries old. (*No Man's Land*, p. 139).

⁷⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), p. 60.

b - Political Anti-pastoral

We can apply Roger Sales's political definition of the use of the pastoral in Pinter's later plays. For Sales, the pastoral represents the 'five Rs': 'refuge, reflection, rescue, requiem, and reconstruction'.⁷⁶ What Pinter created in the 1980s and 1990s is 'political anti-pastoral'. The contrast is obvious: while pastoral in the memory plays is a subjective fantasy, resonating riddles with carnivalesque delight, the political plays and, especially, *Ashes to Ashes* are a direct anti-pastoral reply to them. The new characters introduce an uncomfortable pastoral; the natural world can no longer be constructed as a land of dreams, but is in fact a bleak battle - monstrous. A brutally corrupt society is matched by landscapes, a more realistic form of the pastoral, where the sweet life is challenged by suffering. Pinter's purpose is summed up in *Ashes to Ashes* by the horrifically anti-pastoral view through Rebecca's country-house window; she watches people shepherded to the sea to be drowned. Like Pinter, she becomes preoccupied with the tensions between reality and the world of the imagination.

In *Mountain Language*, Pinter portrays the exploitation of the 'mountain people'. He delivers the poetic punch-line of the play via a pastoral scene. The pastoral here is colonised by an authoritarian metropolis and survives only in the imagination of two victimised characters, as - in Raymond Williams's phrase - 'an idealisation, based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, served to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time.'⁷⁷ Here Pinter reinterprets the pastoral in terms of his ideological values. To quote Gifford,

⁷⁶ Roger Sales, *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p. 17.

⁷⁷ Williams, *The Country*, p. 60.

The pastoral can be a mode of political critique of present society, or it can be a dramatic form of unresolved dialogue about the tensions in that society, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension. It is this very versatility of the pastoral to both contain and appear to evade tensions and contradictions - between country and city, art and nature, the human and the non-human, our social and our inner selves, our masculine and our feminine selves - that made the form so durable and so fascinating.⁷⁸

Although the pastoral remains in the imaginary realm as an escape from social and political responsibility, as Lawrence Buell suggests 'it may be more strategised than mystified.'⁷⁹ Therefore, the pastoral in Pinter's political plays, as opposed to the fantasy-reality of the memory plays, formulates a relationship between fictional and empirical reality. Pinter's political anti-pastoral confronts a need for a pastoral poetry that returns to speak to contemporary concerns.

Pinter's memory plays and political plays (especially *Mountain Language* and *Party Time*) portray the city as a colonial present, and the country as a mythological past. While the memory plays examine the relationships between notions of male and female, the later plays examine the relationships between the personal and the political. In 1993, with *Moonlight*, Pinter returned to the pastoral as a landscape of 'retreat' and fantasy. *Moonlight*'s very title suggests a pastoral realm, retreat through linguistic idealisation, a perfect location for a poetic paradise. The heroine, Bridget, retreats into a Nature that never deceives.

⁷⁸ Gifford, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 44.

Landscape

Landscape (1968) and *Silence* (1969) both indicate a new direction, and are crucial to the argument of this thesis. As Pinter himself said:

I felt that after *The Homecoming*,...I couldn't any longer stay in the room with this bunch of people who opened doors and came in and went out. *Landscape* and *Silence* are in a very different form. There isn't any menace at all.⁸⁰

In Pinter's drama, conventional mimesis/physical action is, after the earlier plays, diminished. Starting with *Landscape*, Pinter's characters are no longer locked in their mimetic rooms. Instead, they explore external diegetic space, the space of speech, treating locations not geographically but mentally. The plays embody the characters' inner landscapes through speech and memory to decode the tensions and contradictions between city and country, masculinity and femininity, the characters' social and inner selves.

What distinguishes *Landscape* and *Silence* is their lyrical quality, in which rhythm is particularly important.⁸¹ Experimenting with the forms of poetic drama, they lack physical action; instead, they present the characters' interior dreams and private personalities. These plays - which also heighten Pinter's fascination with silence and understatement, going beyond the political to the metaphysical - are located in a land of make-believe through the protagonists' subjective/imaginary perceptions.

Landscape explores the opposite gender characteristics of space. The play is, particularly, an achievement in terms of its exploration of the differences between male and female uses of language: the idyllic and the coarse. Mimetically and diegetically,

⁸⁰ Pinter as quoted on the cover of *Landscape* and *Silence* (London: Methuen, 1978).

⁸¹ The references to *Landscape* and *Silence* are from *Plays: Three* (London: Methuen, 1978).

the play is a complex evocation of pastoral space - the charms of natural life through its female character, versus a feeling of disturbance and insecurity, through the man.

Landscape is about the isolated and contradictory memory landscapes of a husband and wife. Beth, 'a woman in her late forties' and Duff, 'a man in his early fifties', sit in the kitchen of a country house. The couple have been taking care of the house as handyman and housekeeper, for a long-gone landlord, Mr Sykes; and now, they inhabit his derelict house. Beth has simply withdrawn herself into a world of memory, or perhaps pure fantasy. Her landscape is backward-looking. She has retreated into a past experience or hope of love fulfilled. Cut off from the present, not only does she not hear Duff, she ignores his existence altogether. Her narrative is for herself alone, not to be shared with Duff. Although the characters share one mimetic space, their consciousness inhabits totally different habitats. While Beth's private thoughts centre on an unidentified man with whom she made love on an isolated beach many years earlier,⁸² Duff concentrates on his daily existence - walking the dog, fishing, going to the pub, working in the garden - and his unease.

The play consists of cross-cut monologues rather than dialogues. The characters do not hear each other's speech; they speak independently of each other. According to the stage directions, '*Duff refers normally to Beth but does not appear to hear her voice. Beth never looks at Duff and does not appear to hear his voice. Both characters are relaxed, in no sense rigid*' (p. 175). Beth starts to decode her hermetic memory and,

⁸² The unidentified man in Beth's fantasy landscape is clearly Duff. Because a woman can only suggest to have a baby to her husband, not to her lover. Beth says, 'I lay down beside him and whispered, would you like a baby? A child? Of our own? Would be nice', and similarly, Pinter's letter to the director of the first German performance of *Landscape* in Hamburg (10 January 1970) confirms that 'the man on the beach is Duff', cited in Martin Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1992), pp. 163-64.

like Willie in *Happy Days*, Duff tries to gain access to communication with her. Technically, the play's physical closeness and emotional separation links Pinter to Beckett, as Pinter's characters, too, 'would learn to talk alone. [*Pause.*] By that I mean to myself, the wilderness'.⁸³ Unlike Beckett's characters, though, Pinter's are dependent on each other; Duff especially needs Beth as his imprisoned audience. However, Beth's accounts are for herself alone. The characters' repetitions of the same events also recall Beckett, because, 'there is so little one can say, one says it all. [*Pause.*] All one can. [*Pause.*] And no truth in it anywhere. [*Pause.*]' (*Happy Days*, p. 161). But Beckett's comparable figures are strange and 'rigid'; Pinter stresses that his characters' condition is in no sense abstract or unusual.

Landscape reconstructs the pastoral as a lost psychic space by linking nature with human emotion. All of Beth's lines describe a nostalgic paradise, which 'is something I cared for' (p. 177). One day her lover took her to a 'very desolate beach, that no-one else in the world knew' (p. 190). She remembers or fantasises the minute details of that hot day by the sea with 'her' man: 'I walked from the dune to the shore. My man slept in the dune. He turned over as I stood. His eyelids. Belly button. Snoozing how lovely' (p. 177). In contrast to Beth's tranquil landscape, where 'people move so easily' (p. 177), Duff complains about 'a downfall', and how he 'had to shelter under a tree [...] because of the rain' (p. 178). Duff needs a 'shelter' in his landscape.⁸⁴ While Beth welcomes hers with its 'shadow' and 'sand', Duff finds his own mental world bothersome, with its birds 'hopping' and 'making a racket'. The rhythm of Beth's

⁸³ Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 135-68 (p. 160).

⁸⁴ Pinter crossed out Beth's line in the draft: 'I lay down by him, in our shelter' to show that Beth does not need a shelter in her open landscape, whereas Duff clearly does. *The Pinter Archive*, Loan no. 110, Box no. 28 (*Landscape, Silence*).

speech is leisurely, effortless, and smooth: 'He touched the back of my neck. His fingers, lightly, touching, lightly, touching, the back, of my neck' (p. 181), whereas Duff's is brutal and strenuous: 'Mind you, there was a lot of shit all over the place, all along the paths, by the pond. Dogshit, duckshit...all kinds of shit...all over the paths. The rain didn't clean it up. It made it even more treacherous' (p. 180).

All through the play Beth sustains her serenity and linearity. Duff, on the other hand, is frustrated and his mood, reflected in his speech, is inconsistent. He is defeated, because he feels a magnetic attraction towards Beth's landscape but he cannot attain it. Beth's is a realm of intimacy: 'I wore a white beach robe. Underneath I was naked' (p. 181). Contrarily, Duff finds only insecurity as he speaks: 'The funny thing was, when I looked, when the shower was over, the man and woman under the trees on the other side of the pond had gone. There wasn't a soul in the park' (p. 181).

He continues patiently in his effort to communicate with his wife, and sometimes his speech almost coheres with Beth's. As he talks about fishing, he describes fish as 'very shy creatures. You've got to woo them. You must never get excited with them. Or flurried. Never' (p. 182). They are metaphorical women; his description of the 'fish' outlines Beth's 'shy', private character, which Duff has failed to handle with care.⁸⁵ His mood changes very quickly when he talks about the incident in the pub. He loses his patience and temper recalling how 'Some nut [...] made a criticism of the beer', saying 'Someone's used this pintpot instead of the boghole' (p. 183). Even then, however,

⁸⁵ Beth's shyness was clear to Pinter in the first draft, as his hand-written notes draft the final scene: 'Final scene - Beach on Beach
- she shy
- he tough - references to her other lovers', *The Pinter Archive*.

although they do not hear each other, their monologues still echo each other distantly. Duff talks about the disturbing row at the pub⁸⁶; Beth talks about a hotel bar near the sea. Their failed closeness becomes tragic.

Beth's inner self is set against her husband's domestic picture of her. While Beth uses language to model herself lyrically as beautiful, childbearing, flower-watering, and adored, Duff's picture of her is simply domestic - a first-rate housekeeper and servant who never 'made a fuss', attractively dressed to give a good impression to Mr Sykes's guests, and a good wife who forgives him his unfaithfulness with a kiss.

The play explores the differences between male and female verbalisations and realisations of pastoral space. Beth's delicate passages and Duff's roughness show their contrasting diction. Another related dichotomy is revealed by their attitudes towards sex, as Pinter explores male and female psycho-sexual subjectivity. Beth and Duff have very different erotic fantasies. Beth's attitude is romantic and love-fulfilling:

I slipped out of my costume and put on my beachrobe. Underneath I was naked. There wasn't a soul on the beach. [...] I lay down beside him and whispered. Would you like a baby? A child? Of our own? Would be nice. (p. 185).

Beth's unnamed lover represents an idyllic love, no longer present, adored only in memory. Duff, too, has an earlier sexual relationship stored in his memory, a trip to the north with Mr Sykes.⁸⁷ As Kristin Morrison, also, mentions, 'These two anecdotes, sexual indiscretions treated so differently, pinpoint an important difference between this

⁸⁶ Duff's language about this pub incident originally included more physical violence in the draft: 'This man didn't know what I knew about American bars. He didn't know that the barman always keeps a tube of lead piping behind the bar. He'll use it like a shot if there's any trouble. Or rubber. But of course the landlord didn't have anything like that.' *The Pinter Archive*.

⁸⁷ Mr Sykes is a metaphor for love. It has gone away, and since its going, their marriage has become a ruin, derelict. It is no coincidence that Duff's infidelity occurred while he was with Sykes.

husband and wife: the casual impersonal nature of sex for him; the highly charged, deeply personal meaning for her.’⁸⁸ The brutal nature of his infidelity clashes with Beth’s romantic relationship: ‘The girl herself I considered unimportant’ (p. 190). The essence of Duff’s adultery is the physical act, not human communion, whereas Beth’s is more personal, as she cherishes these memories of ‘my man’ and speaks lovingly and repeatedly of the details. She continues her dreamy celebration of ‘the lightness of your touch, the lightness of your look, my neck, your eyes, the silence’, while Duff, trained as a cellarman, brags about his phallic expertise and superiority as he recalls his vigorous lecture on beer: ‘The bung is on the vertical, in the bunghole. Spile the bung. Hammer the spile through the centre of the bung’ (p. 193). Once more the contrast between man and woman is sharpened as Beth floats and Duff hammers.

Beth ‘saw children in the valley’ through her window; they ‘were running through the grass [...] up the hill’ (p. 195). Duff, on the other hand, ‘never saw your face. You were standing by the windows. One of those black nights. A downfall. All I could hear was the rain on the glass, smacking on the glass’ (p. 195). Gradually Duff’s speech erupts into coarse violence:

I took the chain off and the thimble, the keys, the scissors slid off and clattered down. I booted the gong down the hall. The dog came in. I thought you would come to me, I thought you would come into my arms and kiss me, even...offer yourself to me. I would have had you in front of the dog, like a man, in the hall, on the stone, banging the gong, mind you don’t get the scissors up your arse, or the thimble, don’t worry, I’ll throw them for the dog to chase, the thimble will keep the dog happy, he’ll play with it with his paws, you’ll plead with me like a woman, I’ll bang the gong on the floor, [...] (p. 197).

⁸⁸ Kristin Morrison, *Canter and Chronicles* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 132.

But Duff's final image of sexuality shows his insecurity and defeat. Beth does not hear him, though he thinks she does. His relentless vulgarity is at its climax here as he barks 'like a man', 'like a woman', booting, banging, slamming, gonging, hooking. It is an important moment for Pinter's development because, whereas the audience had no way of distinguishing morally between the sexual behaviour of the women and men in *The Homecoming*, Duff's view of sexuality is blatantly obscene and inferior. Throughout their marriage, Beth has dealt with it by simply not hearing, by withdrawing into another fantasy of sexuality. In the draft, Beth's lines explain in detail her concept of sex as a utopian fantasy; it is inconceivable to man (here her father, who is oppressive like her husband), whose perception of sex is merely physical:

My father called me in and told me to sit down. He asked me was it true? I said yes. He asked me whose was it? I said that didn't matter. He didn't shout at me or anything. He asked whose it was. I said mine. He said the man. Who is the man? What religion had the man? I said it was mine. There was no man. There was just me. He shouted. There must have been a man. No he told me my mother was dead. I said I wasn't interested in men, I said I wasn't interested in sex, drawing was the only thing that interested me.⁸⁹

Both her father and her husband emphasise the physical aspect of sex, which is the reason for their unease, and violent diction. However, Beth finds peace and shelter in art. Not men, but 'drawing' can attract and seduce her. Indeed, Beth could be an artist. But because of the suppressive patriarchy of her father and husband, she can practise her art only in her private landscape. Followed by Duff's loud, offensive, energetic narration, Beth's flow of words and the touch of memory give the play its quiet close:

He lay above me and looked down at me. He supported my shoulder.

Pause

⁸⁹ *The Pinter Archive*.

So tender his touch on my neck. So softly his kiss on my cheek.

Pause

My hand on his ribs.

Pause

So sweetly the sand over me. Tiny the sand on my skin.

Pause

So silent the sky in my eyes. Gently the sound of the tide.

Pause

Oh my true love I said. (pp. 197-98).

Pinter creates two entirely different ranges of voices - male and female. The delicacy and lyricism of the woman's diction finally makes the play musical and poetic, despite Duff's increasingly violent, coarse diction, which presents his failure, frustration, and insecurity at her withdrawal into another place. The pastoral keeps alive the warmth and delicacy of the eroticism of her youth. It is a mythic space for Beth's unconfessed, but re-created infidelity, which contrasts with Duff's acknowledged guilt. In *Landscape*, Pinter draws a utopian, desired landscape, which is formless and mysterious. Yet this unreal, otherworldly and unfeasible space is possessed neither by man nor by woman. Although Beth can reach her landscape through utopian dreams, and memories, it will not be integrated into her exterior life. Exterior/physical life is unessential for Beth, hence she inhabits an interior existence where, through her art of drawing, she is able to draw images and sketch still landscapes.

Landscape is a sad story; it is also offered as a typical story. The derelict house is a metaphor for their marriage. Duff is optimistic of rekindling their romance, whereas Beth is resigned to the fact that it never will be. The central irony is dominant in the

final contrasting images: Duff's fantasy of a physical relationship reflects his passionately felt anger and his failure to communicate with Beth, and Beth's love-fulfilled memory remains as her ideal, mythical connection with her own landscape.

Silence

From *Landscape* onwards, Pinter's audiences seemed to be looking at a mind rather than a room, watching a mimetic/visible event overlaid with aural images of other external scenes. Both characters in *Landscape* create and re-imagine their own worlds interwoven through memories. This goal of creating one's own 'mental place' is still more striking in *Silence*, where Pinter simply gives each character a blank stage: '*Three areas. A chair in each area.*'

Like *Landscape*, *Silence* reconstructs human alienation in a poetic way. *Silence* works as the linguistic acts of isolated individuals (man and woman). It focuses on three country characters: Ellen, 'a girl in her twenties', Rumsey, 'a man of forty' and Bates, 'a man in his middle thirties'. The play is haunted by the past triangular relationship between Rumsey, Ellen and Bates: 'There are two. One who is with me sometimes, and another' (p. 201). Rumsey had advised Ellen to look for a younger man and had broken with her; he has led a quiet, perhaps contented existence on his farm. Meanwhile, Ellen met Bates, but they led an unhappy urban life, longing to escape it, and finally broke up. None of the characters relates to the others in the present. They sit in different areas, remember their relationships and the places they have known at different stages of their lives. At one point they are young, at another old.

Pinter once said that *Silence* took him longer than his other plays to write because 'the structure was so different'.⁹⁰ *Silence* is a structure, constructed by 'silences'. Kristin Morrison is one of the many critics who are puzzled by this play. She analyses the use of narrative in *Landscape* and *Silence*, which she argues is successfully achieved in *Landscape* and fails awkwardly in *Silence*.⁹¹ Contrary to her argument, however, the play's magnetic lyricism and emotion lie in its successful, not in the least puzzling, narrative flow. The point of the play is made clear by giving necessary credit to the calls for 'silence' in the stage directions. Pinter's letter to the German director, Hans Schweikart, makes this clear:

The first thing I would like to emphasise with regard to *Silence* is that the characters during the first two thirds of the play should be seen in two stages of their lives, in a young one and in one, let's say, 25 years later...I present them one moment as young and in the next as old. I think you will discover that the silences announce the change from youth to old age and back again.⁹²

Unlike *Landscape*, *Silence* does not present a simple male versus female duality, but finally it does concur with the earlier play because, although the men have different temperaments and make contrary choices (city/country), there is a fluidity in the female that they can neither control, possess nor match.

This work, so very systematic in its all-powerful personified silences, is also structured like a poem through its verbal echoes, repetitions and rhyming memories. Until the first silence, Pinter presents the characters as young. Rumsey, with his lyrical and gentle language, remembers 'his' girl, who wears grey clothes for his eyes. He is a stroller in

⁹⁰ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1971, p. 36.

⁹¹ Morrison, p. 137.

⁹² See C. Clausius, 'Spatialised Time in Harold Pinter's *Silence*', *Pinter Review: Annual Essays*, 1995, pp. 28-40 (p. 39).

the country, sensitive to the landscape and the animals. He loves and listens, and he also lets go:

I tell her my life's thoughts, clouds racing. She looks up at me or listens looking down. She stops in midsentence, my sentence, to look up at me. Sometimes her hand slips from mine, her arm loosened, she walks slightly apart, dog barks.

Rumsey's romantic narrative space - a walk in the country with his girl, on good evenings, through the hills - is followed by Ellen's experience of the same walk: the images associate her with space and freedom: 'Sometimes the wind is so high he does not hear me. I lead him to a tree, clasp closely to him and whisper to him' (p. 202). Ellen shares images with Rumsey: the listening, the dogs, the clouds, and the wind. And her memory of her arrival at his house (as he 'put a light on, it reflected the window, it reflected in the window' (p. 202)), is juxtaposed to Rumsey's parallel narration: 'She walks from the door to the window to see the way she has come, to confirm that the house which grew nearer is the same one she stands in, that the path and the bushes are the same, that the gate is the same. When I stand beside her and smile at her, she looks at me and smiles' (p. 202). (In the first production, the floor of John Bury's set reflected the actors, suggesting their multiple selves and matching the way that moments like this are described from different perspectives, mirror images).

While Rumsey describes a romantic and idyllic relationship in his farmhouse, Bates, younger and more sexual, locates his relationship with Ellen in squalid urban

surroundings. His city is placed in opposition to Rumsey's pastoral countryside. His city is a 'mechanical, agentless environment'⁹³:

Caught a bus to the town. Crowds. Lights round the market, rain and stinking. Showed her the bumping lights. Took her down around the dumps. Black roads and girders. She clutching me. This way the way I bring you. Pubs throw the doors smack into the night. Cars barking and the lights. She with me, clutching. Brought her into this place, my cousin runs it. Undressed her, placed my hand. (p. 202).

In contrast to Rumsey, Bates is a rider of buses to the city, restless, unsatisfied and anxious in his relationships - frantic, as Duff, for a love he cannot achieve. In a sense, Pinter splits masculinity in two here; one aspect is located in the country and the other in the city. Rumsey portrays the pastoral imagination as a space of content, in stark contrast to the urban. Bates is blasphemous of Rumsey's idealism. The countryside is discomfoting and suffocating - a trap for Bates: 'I walk in my mind. But can't get out of the walls, into a wind. Meadows are walled, and lakes. The sky is a wall' (p. 208). As opposed to Rumsey's idyllic descriptions, Bates's distorted representation of the pastoral is uncomfortable, a protest:

How many times standing clenched in the pissing dark waiting?

The mud, the cows, the river.

You cross the field out of darkness. You arrive.

You stand breathing before me. You smile.

I put my hands on your shoulders and press. Press the smile off your face. (pp. 202-03).

⁹³ A. R. Braunmuller, 'Pinter's *Silence*: Experience without Character', in *Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches*, ed. by Steven H. Gale (London: Associated University Press, 1986), pp. 118-27 (p. 123).

Ellen's lyrical statement, followed by a silence, completes the first cycle of the play. 'There are two. I turn to them and speak. I look them in their eyes. I kiss them there and say, I look away to smile, and touch them as I turn. *Silence*' (p. 203).

The first silence announces a change from youth to late middle age - as Pinter commented, 'Let's say, 25 years later'. Now the characters' relationships are over, so are the passion, romance and sexuality. The characters - not only mimetically, but also diegetically - are separated from each other, leading solitary lives, and living via their interior dreams. Now Rumsey is alone in the country watching the folding light: 'My animals are quiet. My heart never bangs. [...] There is nothing required of me' (p. 203). Nothing could seem more distinct than Rumsey's ease and sense of infinite freedom. Nevertheless, his isolation is a lack of completion. Bates, on the other hand, talks about his 'unendurable' life in the city, which is like 'living in the dark':

I'm at my last gasp with this unendurable racket. I kicked open the door and stood before them. Someone called me Granddad and told me to button it. It's they should button it. Were I young...

One of them told me I was lucky to be alive, that I would have to bear it in order to pay for being alive, in order to give thanks for being alive.

It's a question of sleep. I need something of it, or how can I remain alive, without any true rest, having no solace, not even any damn inconstant solace.

I am strong, but not as strong as the bastards in the other room, and their tittering bitches, and their music, and their love.

If I changed my life, perhaps, and lived deliberately at night, and slept in the day. But what exactly would I do? What can be meant by living in the dark? (pp. 203-04).

Bates is the *flâneur*, the lonely man haunting the streets. The institution of the city, an 'unendurable racket', shapes and interacts with his consciousness, forcing him to 'live in the dark'.

And Ellen, too, now lives in the city. She meets a drinking companion who asks her about her early life and the sexual part of her youth: 'I'm old, I tell her, my youth was somewhere else, anyway I don't remember' (p. 204). Here Ellen consigns her sexual nature to her youth and displaces it completely; she does not even want to remember it. She lives in a room with 'a pleasant view'. Her memories of the past are not mournful like Bates's or nostalgic like Rumsey's. Rumsey is self-sufficient in his private, solitary country existence; Bates draws strength from his anger and resentment; Ellen defines herself, entirely, through her present self: 'I'm still quite pretty really, quite nice eyes, nice skin' (p. 205).

However, the pastoral present cannot be segregated; the characters' old-age, cross-cut soliloquies are interrupted as '*BATES moves to ELLEN*' and reproduces/re-enacts an earlier monologue in dialogue form with her, about a past meeting: 'All right. I'll take you on a bus to the town. I know a place. My cousin runs it' (p. 207). Ellen's rejection of Bates's suggestion is followed by the second silence, which takes the characters back to old age. Rumsey talks about his solitary rural life, 'a curiously hot day': 'Sitting weather, I call it. The weather sits, does not move' (p. 207). Bates's lines echo his previous speech: 'Meadows are walled, and lakes. The sky is a wall'. He feels a painful nostalgia for his past, lost love now ('Once I had a little girl. I took it for walks') and remembers Ellen asking about 'something in a tree, a shape, a shadow. It is leaning down. It is looking at us. Maybe it's a bird, I said, a big bird, resting' (p. 208).

The next moment, which is marked by another silence, presents the characters as young again, and mobile. Ellen's fragmented image of her youthful, tender love in a pastoral environment ('When I run...when I run...when I run...over the grass...') is juxtaposed by Rumsey's image of the same incident ('She floats...under me. Floating...under me') and completed by her delicate narration: 'I turn. I turn. I glide. I wheel. In stunning light. The horizon moves from the sun. I am crushed by the light' (p. 208). In the instant of greatest intimacy, Ellen finds freedom and unlimited space.

As the play advances, the characters' initial monologues about their memories are enacted in dialogue form. The play consists of repeated cycles of introductory images between Rumsey and Ellen, or Bates and Ellen. As an old man, Rumsey talks about how he loses and recaptures sight of the people he sees in his isolated space: 'They are sharp at first sight...then smudged...then lost...then glimpsed again...then gone'. Rumsey's use of the passive voice shows that he remains uninvolved as a spectator, a voyeur, whereas Bates is imprisoned within the solid walls of his memories. Despite their differences, however, they share a temporal imprisonment. In her old age, Ellen, too, feels lonely in the silence: 'Around me sits the night. Such a silence. I can hear myself' (p. 211). C. Clausius notes that Pinter uses 'the spatial concreteness of the theatrical event on stage to actively serve the drama's temporal concerns'. He argues that Pinter makes startling and perceptive use of 'the strictures of theatrical space by using this spatial arena as a way of investigating the temporal boundaries within which the characters think and live'.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Clausius, p. 28.

While the men speak their memories more or less in chronological sequence, Ellen interrupts their linear flow by returning to the lyrical centre of the drama: 'There are two. I turn to them and speak. I look them in their eyes. I kiss them there and say, I look away to smile, and touch them as I turn.' Neither the men nor her memories of them have the power to imprison Ellen. She turns her eyes from one to the other; her narrative space can go from one man to his rival, from her earlier self to her present self, whereas Rumsey and Bates must confine themselves either to the past or to the present, country or town. The play reveals that while the two men remain enclosed within their narrative spaces, Ellen manages to resist the limitation in her own narration.⁹⁵ Towards the end, the characters' spaces decrease as they recapitulate different stages of their lives - one moment young, one moment old - with images and memories that have been 'sharp', 'smudged', 'lost', and 'glimpsed' all through the play and are finally 'gone'.

Rumsey and Bates begin at the beginning, repeat the key moments of memory and situate themselves and their reminiscences in the country or the town. While Rumsey is charmed by country life, and recycles his idyllic relationship within a poetic landscape, for Bates the 'natural' world is the indifferent, crowded, confined cityscape that he once offered Ellen. Landscape for Bates is neither comforting nor known, 'something in a tree, a shape, a shadow.' While Rumsey and Ellen's speeches blend and unite in their lyrical diction, incidents, and images, Bates's memories erase the harmony

⁹⁵ From the beginning, Pinter defined Ellen's fluidity and independence. In the draft, Man 1 (Rumsey) suggests to the Girl (Ellen) to find a young man:

Girl: I don't like them. There aren't any.

Man 1: Of course there are.

Girl: Only in the town. I never want to go to the town, to live in the town.

Man 1: Never.

Girl: No. Oh I might. For a time.

The Pinter Archive, Box no. 28 (*Landscape, Silence*).

through verbs indicating stress, fear and discomfort, and through linguistic and physical violence: 'pissing', 'stinking', 'clutching', 'suffocating', and 'I put my hands on your shoulders and press. Press the smile off your face'. Where Rumsey revels quietly in rusticity and the rueful acceptance of loss, Bates is insulting and uneasy: 'The mud, the cows, the river.' Like Duff's speech in *Landscape*, Bates's language is dominated by the language of violence, vulgarity and impact - showing his frustration and insecurity.

The preoccupations of this play - solitude and association, youth and age, country and city - are explored through lyricism, which carries representations of an ideal and a desired pastoral through male and female voices. Like *Landscape*, *Silence* examines the pastoral space as a mythical memory, a lost psychic space linking nature with human emotion, a landscape used to express the characters' dreams and desires. Pastoral landscape is used as a means to exploit the tension between speech and silence. It is symbolic that, although the speech is highly lyrical, the interaction between the characters takes place in silence. Ironically, the characters of *Silence* are not silent; they speak and act to locate their lives of emotional conflicts, until a '*Long Silence*' falls at the end.

Landscape and *Silence* launched a disengagement, in Pinter's stage plays, from the physical space evident in his earlier drama; there is no more of that fierce contest to master concrete territory. Instead, these lyrical works explore linguistic geography as a subjective experience for each of us. In the 1970s, Pinter's subsequent memory plays expanded the visual language of stage realism by embodying his people's private, inner landscapes.

In the Maze of London: Dislocation in *Old Times*

In many of Pinter's plays, the space of speech usurps the stage space. For example, in *The Homecoming*, Ruth and the three men create in their minds a house in Greek Street with three rooms and a bathroom, where Ruth would earn 'the money herself - on her back' (*The Homecoming*, p. 88). Ruth's triumph stems from her ability to accept this male fantasy, so she dominates the physical onstage space of the actual house where they live. The invisible linguistic space, which conquers visible reality, pushes its way further into the stage scene in *Old Times* (1971).⁹⁶ The characters in *Old Times* seem to have spent all their real lives in other places: the London flat shared by Kate and Anna as young women, the cinema where Deeley once saw 'Odd Man Out', The Wayfarer's Tavern where Deeley insists that he has seen Anna. As in *Landscape and Silence*, the drama in *Old Times* is born out of an evocation of offstage locales. Again, the audience seems to be looking into a mind rather than a room. The characters' present narrative places existed in some former time, in memory, in fantasy. Their speech and memories describe a social space of decay and dispossession in the basic unit of space - the room.

The characters are magnetically attracted towards each other's space. Anna, an old friend of Kate's, comes to visit Kate and her husband in their 'converted farmhouse'. Anna's visit urges, in the characters' narratives, a rejuvenation of their past lives; they reinterpret the past to fit their present needs. Anna, Kate and Deeley, all middle-aged now, spent their youth in London. At present, Anna says she lives in a fine villa, up on the cliffs on a Sicilian coast, and Kate and Deeley live in the countryside. *Old Times* is a game of place where the characters locate and dislocate each other in order to play and win. The characters' territorial advances and retreats are central to the play. Spatial

⁹⁶ The references to *Old Times* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Methuen, 1984).

inclusion is crucial for the characters' existence - to compete in the power game. Most of the time, evocation of a specific geographical space serves to exclude the rival. The characters need to change the scene constantly; they reinvent the present, re-imagine the past, and embody virtual spaces to achieve a conversational gain in their linguistic battle. They often inhabit places in time: in their past or their imagined future.

In retrospect, Pinter's positioning of his characters at the beginning of the play already establishes that the invisible space of Anna will conquer the visible reality of Deeley and Kate:

Light dim. Three figures discerned.

DEELEY slumped in armchair, still.

KATE curled on a sofa, still.

ANNA standing at the window, looking out.

Silence

Lights up on DEELEY and KATE, smoking cigarettes.

ANNA's figure remains still in dim light at the window. (p. 3).

Deeley asks Kate questions about Anna. He learns that Anna was Kate's 'one and only' friend, and that Anna 'used to steal' Kate's underwear. He is surprised to hear that, in fact, the two women 'lived with each other' in their youth, in London; nevertheless, he concludes, inconsiderately: 'Anyway, none of this matters'. Even when Deeley and Kate start their dialogue, the audience's gaze is still focused on the private, shadowy, and mysterious space inhabited by Anna. Her looking out of the window metaphorically suggests that she comes from the outer world, and that she is an outsider in this territory. Also, her living 'high up on the cliffs', in a fine villa, suggests that she is etherealised, that she is a ghost up in heaven. However, her sudden

participation pushes its way into their scene, as she '*turns from the window, speaking, and moves down to them, eventually sitting on the second sofa*'. Anna's unexpected intervention in the couple's conversation will, in fact, 'matter' to Deeley.

After the opening mysteries, hesitancies and unanswered questions between the man and the woman, Anna introduces a mass of confident information: she offers her own and Kate's memories of the London of the early 1950s when they shared a flat together - a magnetic Benjaminian and a never-real Baudelairean city. Anna starts to describe those years, when she and Kate worked as office secretaries and went to concerts and ate sandwiches in Green Park at lunch time. The two women miss their 'lovely London' (p. 34), its old churches, old buildings, galleries and theatres. Anna is thrilled to recount all those galleries and concerts: 'There was so much to see and to hear, in lovely London then' (p. 34). She describes, happily, the fascination and excitement of being a 'girl' in a place of art, concerts, and cafes where artists and actors met and talked. It is the city of their youth, where they did 'the things they loved' (p. 13). Anna says, 'we were young then of course, but what stamina, and to work in the morning, and to a concert, or the opera, or the ballet, that night' (p. 13). Memories construct the city of the past in a way that is more real than the present. Reminiscent of the Baudelairean *flâneur*, Anna and Kate associated themselves with the metropolitan life. They connected themselves with the anonymous crowd; they made the alien world familiar. And in the present, they create phantom images of how the city drew them into its pace. Anna becomes a highly personal and emotional interpreter as she talks about the urban excitement:

the sheer expectation of it all, the looking-forwardness of it all, and so poor and young, and a girl, in London then...and the cafes we found, almost private ones, weren't they? where

artists and writers and sometimes actors collected, and others with dancers, we sat hardly breathing with our coffee, heads bent, so as not to be seen, so as not to disturb, so as not to distract, and listened and listened to all those words, all those cafes and all those people, creative undoubtedly, and does it still exist I wonder? do you know? can you tell me? (p. 14).

‘The sheer expectation’ became a central theme in Pinter’s memory plays; the characters remember how they looked forward to the future, and how it is not what they imagined.

Anna’s strong association with London is so central to her speech that Deeley feels dislocated. He says ‘We rarely get to London’; but Anna and the audience are not convinced that he ever goes to London. For Deeley, it is ‘quite silent here’, maybe too quiet. He says ‘You can hear the sea sometimes if you listen very carefully’, but again does he ever see the sea? Because he does not go with Kate when she walks off down the lane. At this point, the play emerges as a memory competition between Anna and Kate on one side and Deeley on the other. Deeley is both displaced and perplexed by Anna’s use of words. Anna associates her London days to familiar songs that they used to play ‘all the time, late at night, lying on the floor. [...] Sometimes I’d look at her face, but she was quite unaware of my gaze’ (p. 22). Deeley is confused by Anna’s use of the word ‘gaze’. At first this seems a matter of ‘period’, as Anna characteristically uses an older, more formal vocabulary, and has therefore often been seen as a ‘memory’ herself. But, in fact, *Old Times* conforms to modern theorisation of ‘the gaze’; and, as a man and a film-maker, Deeley assumes it is only *his* prerogative to watch, to observe, and to possess what he sees - especially Kate.

Triumphantly, however, the women refuse to let Deeley incorporate 'his' London into theirs. The place names are weapons of attack - Anna and Deeley duel with them. Anna recalls elegant places: places to do with arts and entertainment - the Albert Hall, Covent Garden, Kensington High Street, the Tate, Greenwich, Green Park. In contrast, Deeley associates himself mainly with 'prostitutes of all kinds', goes to a pub off Brompton Road, connects himself with 'the Edgware Road gang', 'the Maida Vale group', 'big Eric and little Tony', who 'lived near Paddington Library'. But Anna has other places to offer Kate, too. Anna's fanciful Sicilian villa, with its 'marble floored terrace', where they 'drink orange juice in the morning, and bullshots at sunset', becomes the centre of the women's dialogue. Jealous of their conversation, and Kate's continual questions, Deeley bursts out by drawing the opposite picture - reductive, nihilistic and brutally scientific: 'I've been there. There's nothing more to see, there's nothing more to investigate, nothing. There's nothing more in Sicily to investigate' (p. 39). Pinter places Anna's home in a foreign place to make Anna strange and surprising for Deeley, to introduce other places, other imaginations. Anna's materialisation from a geographically different coast suggests for Deeley that she is 'estranged', as David G. Wright puts it, 'from the norms of human contact and conduct, or at least from those rather limited ones which Deeley understands.'⁹⁷ Deeley's attempt 'to investigate' is the reason for his bafflement; but Anna's only aim is to 'associate'; not to 'investigate' but to fictionalise her subjective reminiscences. The women create dialogues through perceptions and fantasies. Puzzled by Anna's language, he is estranged from the women's conversation. In the British Library draft of the play Deeley intends to have control over women. He is boastful like Duff:

⁹⁷ David G. Wright, 'Joyce's Debt to Pinter', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 14.4(Spring 1988), pp. 517-26 (p. 518).

I have indeed met many articulate and sensitive people, mainly prostitutes of all kinds. Some of us have to stay at a distance from life in order to be able to describe it; I am a different case. Do you understand? I mix with all colours and credologies. Only by getting to grips with others can I maintain a grip on myself. This is all something neither of you can appreciate. I'm a professional.⁹⁸

He tries to distinguish himself from those, like Teddy the philosopher in *The Homecoming*, who try to find superiority through 'distance' ('I can see what you do. It's the same as I do. But you're lost in it. You won't get me being. I won't be lost in it' (*The Homecoming*, p. 62)). But contrary to his pretentious self-description, Deeley can neither attain nor 'describe' life nor get to grips with Anna and Kate. He wants the women to 'Stop that!' He knows he should be able to control them, but he cannot. Furthermore, Anna's language distracts and confuses him. She invades Deeley's linguistic territory and his house. His assertions are clearly suspect. He says that he does 'quite a bit of travelling in his job' but actually he wishes he could travel. Anna asks Kate if he is away for long periods. But she is not sure: 'I think, sometimes' and asks Deeley, 'Are you?' There is a clear doubt as to whether Deeley is ever away. And if he is away, Kate 'continues'; she does not have a life of her own.

Pinter portrays Anna as a displaced figure, a wandering outsider. She admires the couple's country house: 'No one who lived here would want to go far. I would not want to go far, I would be afraid of going far, lest when I returned the house would be gone' (p. 15). As past and present overlap, offstage locales invade the mimetic space. Anna and Kate fix the stage in the past as they re-enact a scene from their youth. In this scene, Anna does not want to go out - whereas Kate wants to walk across the park -

⁹⁸ *The Pinter Archive*, Box no. 41 (*Old Times*).

and we realise that the desire to remain in one's own space has always preoccupied her. Here, Anna's previous recognition of her 'lovely' city, with its excitement and richness, is replaced by her description of urban terror, vastness, self-estrangement, insecurity and despair:

The park is dirty at night, all sorts of horrible people, men hiding behind trees and women with terrible voices, they scream at you as you go past, and people come out suddenly from behind trees and bushes and there are shadows everywhere and there are policemen, and you'll have a horrible walk, and you'll see all the traffic and noise of the traffic and you'll see all the hotels, and you know you hate looking through all those swing doors, you hate it, to see all that, all those people in the lights in the lobbies all talking and moving...and all the chandeliers...

Pause

You'll only want to come home if you go out. You'll want to run home...and into your room.
(p. 40).

As in *Landscape* and *Silence*, past and present intermingle; there are no definite lines between them. At the end of Act One, Kate and Anna appear to exist in a habitual past or fantasy world, a routine evening in the city: the women cannot agree on whom to invite and Kate leaves to have a bath. This scene might as well take place in the present because it is interrupted by Deeley, and at the beginning of Act Two Kate is still in the bath, absent. One moment the characters occupy a past narrative space, the next moment the present.

The first act ends with Deeley's dislocation from the women's phantasmal city, but the beginning of Act Two presents Anna and Deeley alone in the bedroom, the most private place in the house; it could, in fact, be the same room, and Kate is still in the

bath. The man is given the chance to square up to the intruder on apparently equal terms. In a tactical reversal, Deeley's vision somehow conquers and colonises Anna's 'lovely' city here, as he starts to pit his London of twenty years ago against hers. Here, he becomes the *flâneur* in the city; he records imaginary images as he watches, gazes at the self-estranged city. He insists that he remembers Anna from 'The Wayfarer's Tavern, just off the Brompton Road':

Oh yes, it was you, no question. I never forget a face. You sat in the corner, quite often, sometimes alone, sometimes with others. And here you are, sitting in my house in the country. The same woman. Incredible. Fellow called Luke used to go in there. You knew him.
(p. 45).

Deeley's references to places and people do not ring any bells with Anna; nevertheless, he goes on projecting his subjective experiences, which persistently include her. Appropriating Anna's previous speech about the literary cafes where artists and poets gathered, he talks about The Wayfarer's Tavern: 'Yes, a whole crowd of them, poets, stunt men, jockeys, stand-up comedians, that kind of setup.' He embodies a virtual appearance for Anna with her black scarf, a black sweater, a skirt, and black stockings. He imposes on her: 'Don't tell me you've forgotten The Wayfarer's Tavern? You might have forgotten the name but you must remember the pub. You were the darling of the saloon bar' (p. 45). Discarding all this, Anna defensively and primly asserts that she did not have 'money for alcohol'. In his game of place, Deeley fixes the off-stage pub with concrete and confident references: 'You had escorts. You didn't have to pay. You were looked after. I bought you a few drinks myself' (p. 46). Deeley locates Anna within his imaginary field of perception; he literally corners her:

We've talked before. In that pub, for example. In the corner. Luke didn't like it much but we ignored him. Later we all went to a party. Someone's flat, somewhere in Westbourne Grove. You sat on a very low sofa, I sat opposite and looked up your skirt. Your black stockings were

very black because your thighs were so white. That's something that's all over now, of course, isn't it, nothing like the same palpable profit in it now, it's all over. But it was worthwhile then. It was worthwhile that night. I simply sat sipping my light ale and gazed...gazed up your skirt. You didn't object, you found my gaze perfectly acceptable. (p. 47).

Of course, at this moment Anna is not prepared for all this. He uses Anna's previous word 'gaze', which he was perplexed by, as a weapon to confuse her; he asserts his right to reduce her to a mildly pornographic object, and then turns her 'lovely' artistic London into a welter of masculine ugliness.

As he was enjoying a 'thigh-kissing view', 'there was a great argument going on, about China or something, or death, or China *and* death'; then he was surrounded by 'a great multitude of men':

They would not let me be but bent down over me, so that what with their stinking breath and their broken teeth and the hair in their noses and China and death and their arses on the arms of my chair I was forced to get up and plunge my way through them, followed by them with ferocity, as if I were the cause of their argument, looking back through smoke, rushing to the table with the linoleum cover to look for one more full bottle of light ale, looking back through smoke, glimpsing two girls on the sofa, one of them you, heads close, whispering, no longer able to see anything, no longer able to see stocking or thigh, and then you were gone. I wandered over to the sofa. There was no one on it. I gazed at the indentations of four buttocks. Two of which were yours. (pp. 47-48).

In his 'gaze', the women became identical physical masses, mere sexual parts, and weight. Ironically, with his 'sad' story - the multitude of men versus the desired intimacy of the one-to-one male-female relationship - Deeley captivates Anna; she associates herself with his off-stage, ferocious urban scenes, and participates in his game:

DEELEY I never saw you in The Wayfarer's Tavern again. Where were you?

ANNA Oh, at concerts, I should think, or the ballet.

London, in *Old Times*, seems to be the City of the Gaze; the characters go to see films, galleries, shows - they watch each other. Deeley thinks it is, therefore, *his* city - as a man and a film-maker, he tries to fit it all into *his* vision, and he is quite happy to be a voyeur. Pinter's own films, especially *The Proust Screenplay*, begin to explore the ways in which film can be 'feminine' (poetic, imagistic, associative, a 'blur') rather than 'objective', factual, persuasive, reductive ('male' in Deeley's terms).

London is distant and 'blurred' in the memory. The characters interpret London, not as a mimetic representation, but rather as an artistic production, an object of their subjective experiences, a series of pictures. They create fictions of the London of their youth, not an actual city, but an invisible one, an imaginary place. The real, centuries-old city, with its houses, buildings, bridges, avenues, parks and pubs, forms a linguistic space in the characters' memories, which becomes like the mazes of the city. Michael Billington identifies the delighted evocation of London with Pinter's London 'of the late 1940s and early 1950s: the pubs, the parties, the cafes, the cinemas, the Bohemian variety of the city before it turned into a hard-nosed tourist toytown.'⁹⁹ Anna and Kate used to socialise in cafes. In Gamber's words, the cafe 'was their public living room - a space free of confinement. [...] It is a space of mediated access to other people, access to a world besides their walled-in female world in their flat.'¹⁰⁰ 'London', as invented by Pinter, is a symbol of the desires and dreads of modern life. When Kate compares

⁹⁹ Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 218.

¹⁰⁰ Cayo Elisabeth Dumais Gamber, 'No Place/Like Home: Feminism, Semiotics and Staged Space', PhD. Thesis (The George Washington University: 1991), p. 138.

city and country, her definition of the urban becomes a resolution to the contesting memories/fantasies of Deeley and Anna. Ultimately, their narrative spaces, for Kate, are no more than a 'blur'. She interprets a never-real Baudelairean city:

The only nice thing about a city is that when it rains it blurs everything, and it blurs the lights from the cars, doesn't it, and it blurs your eyes, and you have rain on your eyelashes. That's the only nice thing about a big city. (p. 55).

The objective of their narratives is to possess Kate, and to win control over her. However, these metropolitan memories, which Anna and Deeley claim have taken place, are no more than indistinct forms to Kate. Anna interprets the city differently from Kate; she contrasts Kate's discomfoting, rainy streets to a cosy home, and she celebrates the delights of a flat in the city: 'That's not the only nice thing. You can have a nice room and a nice gas fire and a warm dressing gown and a nice hot drink, all waiting for you for when you come in' (p. 55).

Anna talks to Deeley about Kate's 'shy' character, says she 'was Bronte in secrecy, in being so stubbornly private', that she used to borrow Kate's underwear to go to parties, and how she used to blush deeply as Anna told her about 'a man at the party' who 'had spent the whole evening looking up my skirt'. Deeley finds Anna's intimate friendship with his wife 'distasteful'; and his narrative space, to which he referred so confidently at the beginning of Act Two, loses control. Deeley is a typical Pinter male character, trapped and humiliated by his own self-contradictory expectation of women. He becomes the odd man out, the outsider, in the elegant and cosmopolitan world that Anna maps around herself and Kate. While the women remain more serene and less dependent, he has to accept his defeat: 'I mean let's put it on the table, I have my eye on a number of pulses, pulses all round the globe, deprivations and insults, why should

I waste valuable space listening to two - ' (p. 63). Here Deeley's question about wasting 'space' is crucial. It is his verbal space that is threatened, not only by Anna but by his wife, too. He uses the word 'space' instead of 'time', because he has all the time he needs, maybe too much time; but he has very little space, both in the mimetic house, and in the women's linguistic city. Pinter, too, intentionally works on Deeley's failure by leaving his sentence unfinished. Because, obviously, what Deeley would say is 'Why should I waste valuable space listening to two [lesbians?]' . Because he has already mentioned that he finds their friendship 'distasteful'. In his mind, he really believes that these women were lovers; at the beginning of the play, he was surprised to learn that the two women 'lived with each other'. But because the obvious word 'lesbian' would be misleading, Deeley is left with an unfinished statement, suggesting clearly that Pinter does not co-operate with him. Against the man's collapse, the women stand upright. 'Shy' and dependent Kate asserts her independence at this point; she consigns Deeley 'To China. Or Sicily'. This is the moment when Anna, *flâneur* of the town, actually disrupts their marriage, as her metropolitan narratives temporarily invade the couple's country associations. Her arrival has caused Kate and Deeley to admit the barrenness of their marriage. Feeling guilty, Anna acknowledges to Deeley that she has come 'here not to disrupt but to celebrate. [...] To celebrate a very old friendship, something that was forged between us long before you knew of our existence.' In the draft of the play, Anna originally says that she has come to celebrate 'an old knowing and a new meeting'. If her meeting with Deeley is new, then Anna participates in his fantasy with great dexterity. Deeley starts to defend himself, and he defames Anna by telling Kate all about their alleged meeting in The Wayfarer's Tavern:

She took a fancy to me. [...] She looked at me with big eyes, shy, all that bit. She was pretending to be you at the time. Did it pretty well. Wearing your underwear she was too, at

the time. [...] She thought she was you, said little, so little. Maybe she was you. Maybe it was you, having coffee with me, saying little, so little. (p. 65).

At this point, Kate allies herself with her husband, and comforts him - looking up her skirt is 'not crass' - but Anna is back in the game. She '*coldly*' admits, 'Oh, it was my skirt. It was me. I remember your look...very well. I remember you well.' However, Kate remembers Anna 'dead'. For the first time Kate speaks at length. Her long description of Anna's metaphorical death establishes Kate as the ultimate winner of this game of place: 'Your face was dirty. You lay dead. [...] Your sheets were immaculate. [...] I would have been unhappy if your corpse had lain in an unwholesome sheet. It would have been graceless. [...] As far as my room was concerned.' Kate accuses Anna of borrowing her 'little slow smile' as she wakes up from her metaphorical death: 'The grin only split the dirt at the sides of your mouth and stuck. You stuck in your grin.' And she continues to describe Anna's state in appalling terms: 'I looked for tears but could see none. Your pupils weren't in your eyes. Your bones were breaking through your face.' Then she distances her own space from this terrifying circumstance: 'But all was serene. There was no suffering. It had all happened elsewhere.' Following Anna's 'dying alone and dirty', Kate describes her 'lengthy bath'. After her bath she was 'glistening' as she watched Anna's dirty dead body. Kate identifies Anna with Deeley by imagining Anna dead with dirt on her face and then remembering preparing to make love to Deeley by putting dirt on his. Kate dirties them both:

I dug about in the window box, where you had planted our pretty pansies, scooped, filled the bowl, and plastered his face with dirt. He was bemused, aghast, resisted, resisted with force. He would not let me dirty his face, or smudge it, he wouldn't let me. He suggested a wedding instead, and a change of environment. (p. 69).

As Barbara Kreps argues, Kate 'finally has the power both to create and destroy. She can bury or marry, but whichever it is, she herself remains untouched.'¹⁰¹ In the end, Kate's narrative silences both of the rivals for her attention. The rest of the play is hers. It is the most extended and enigmatic story in the entire play. She is the possessor of the final verbal territory: 'He asked me once, at about that time, who had slept in that bed before him. I told him no one. No one at all.' Here Kate is denying sexuality altogether. Finally, both male and female partners share the same dirty face. Throughout her personal associations, Kate has literally remained clean, glistening, watching. 'No one at all' has ever possessed her. Neither Anna's 'lovely London' associations, nor Deeley's suggestion of a wedding and 'a change of environment' in the hope that they would bring him some achievement, 'mattered' for Kate.

Of *Old Times*, Pinter said, 'So much is imagined and that imagining is as true as real.'¹⁰² The characters imagine associations that have taken place in various parts of London. In the mind of each character there is a different narrative. Within an enormous narrative awaiting its translator, each character narrates the city in his or her own way. They describe London not as a real city but as a series of pictures. They see it as a refuge. While Anna associates herself with the anonymous crowds, and cherishes the city, Deeley connects his memories to mysterious, obscure and isolated parts of London. He recalls 'some bloody awful summer afternoon in the middle of nowhere' when he 'watched "Odd Man Out"' (p. 25). His memory mysteriously coincides with Anna's when she, together with Kate, went to some unfamiliar place to watch 'Odd

¹⁰¹ Barbara Kreps, 'Time and Harold Pinter's Possible Realities: Art as Life, and Vice Versa', *Modern Drama*, 22(1979), pp. 47-60 (p. 55).

¹⁰² Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1971, p. 17.

Man Out', almost alone. A similar obscurity involves Deeley's meeting with Anna twenty years earlier in *The Wayfarer's Tavern*. According to Pinter,

The fact that they discuss something that he says took place - even if it did not take place - actually seems to me to recreate the time and the moment vividly in the present, so that it is actually taking place before your very eyes - by the words he is using. By the end of this particular section of the play, they are sharing something in the present.¹⁰³

So, the relationships the characters describe are not actually stored in their memories, but rather they are constructed subsequently through language; in Anna's words; 'There are things I remember which may never have happened but as I recall them so they take place' (p. 28). Their descriptions of subjective virtual relationships, which took place in virtual places, should rather be read as purely linguistic, and as an act of imagination. The characters' narratives, which are the outcome of their failing (fading) memories, are fictionalisations of their past lives. They steal images and fantasies from each other. For each character, the city becomes a stage to be read individually. Their memories and the city are interwoven; the city shapes and interacts with their consciousness as they re-imagine their urban past lives. Despite Deeley's despairing recollections of London, the women's memories remain enthusiastic and glistening.

Pinter, fascinatingly, enriched the texture of his work with pastoral images in the late sixties and early seventies, when he was writing in and about an urban world; and as well as exploring notions of the metropolis, *Old Times'* diegetic fields evoke the country. While Anna and Deeley fictionalise and contest fragments of memories from their metropolitan lives, Kate, who is quiet most of the time, spasmodically relocates them in 'her' country. Against their metropolitan fantasy-reality, she introduces a more

¹⁰³ Ibid.

solid, and a subtler linguistic scenery. Her narrative is dominated by a pastoral that is both celebratory and savage.

For Pinter, himself, and his characters, the pastoral is a retreat. This is made straightforwardly plain in Deeley's speech in the draft of *Old Times*: 'I moved to the country to get away from these pressures, political and philosophical pressures, for a bit, between jobs.'¹⁰⁴

Following the rural plays *Landscape* and *Silence*, *Old Times* is set in the silent countryside. All the characters have abandoned London; in Deeley's words they 'rarely get to London'. Silence is the most definitive manifestation of the countryside; it is, in Pinter's terms, the ultimate naked stage. Anna is charmed by the silence: 'How wise you were to choose this part of the world, and how sensible and courageous of you both to stay permanently in such a silence' (p. 15). She is 'delighted to be here', where 'the sky is so still' and where she can see 'that tiny ribbon of light'. Deeley uses pastoral images to describe Kate: her 'floating', her being 'compliant to the shifting winds'. Anna, too, defines her in idyllic terms: her being a 'dreamer', her waiting for the ripples before she jumps into cold water, which is a metaphor for the character of Kate, who 'never did things loosely or carelessly, recklessly'. However, it is mostly Kate who associates herself with the poetic landscape. Her idyllic and idealistic language dominates both Anna and Deeley. Kate's pastoral passages focus upon nature in contrast to the urban context. She expresses her preference for the country over London - the softness of the seaside as against the hard lines of the city. In her love of the country and dislike of the city, she describes her dislike of 'edges' and 'harsh lines';

¹⁰⁴ *The Pinter Archive*, Box no. 41 (*Old Times*).

the exception being when rain in the city blurs things such as the lights of the cars; it 'blurs your eyes'. She says that she feels fresh in the country:

The water is very soft here. Much softer than London. I always find the water very hard in London. That's one reason I like living in the country. Everything's softer. The water, the light, the shapes, the sounds. There aren't such edges here. And living close to the sea too. (p. 55).

She expresses her delight in the natural with a 'carnavalesque' and celebratory attitude.

Kate is delighted by the countryside; Anna insists on the incomparability of the metropolis where she spent her long-ago youth: 'But I would miss London, nevertheless. But of course I was a girl in London. We were girls together' (p. 16). Kate has no fear of walking outside, into the park; but Anna is terrified by the indefinite spaces outside, and needs the security and intimacy of a room: 'You'll only want to come home if you go out.' Anna, is in fact, the very opposite of Kate: Anna, of the volcanic island, Kate, of a silent coast; Anna, dirty, Kate, clean; Anna 'dead', Kate sitting upright, alive.

Anna lives 'on a very different coast', 'on a volcanic island' in Sicily with her 'invisible' husband. Coincidentally, Anna lives near Taormina:

DEELEY Yes, I know Sicily slightly. Just slightly. Taormina. Do you live in Taormina?

ANNA Just outside.

DEELEY Just outside yes.

The psychological and verbal battle soon focuses on that fantasy world. She describes her home as 'a rather fine villa' very high up, in the cliffs (p. 36). Deeley eagerly goes into details, colonising it: he 'probably caught a glimpse of [her] villa', and he verbally

incorporates it into his work, his high-status connections. He dismisses Anna's account of her luxurious marble-floored villa as unreal, and at this point his own masculine fantasies veer out of control with his strange joking claim to be Orson Welles. He 'had a crew in Sicily' (p. 38). Deeley, the film maker, sees himself as a cultural buccaneer, a free man: 'I travel the globe in my job' (p. 35). But then Kate interferes; she attempts to draw a more abstract, more imagistic and more hauntingly tactile fantasy world out of where Anna lives. Ironically, through sequences of filmic images, she asks Anna if they have marble floors on which they walk bare foot. Later in the play, Deeley attempts to get rid of Anna by reminding her of her lonely husband, whom he imagines as another version of himself,

lurching up and down the terrace, waiting for a speedboat to spill out beautiful people, at least. Beautiful Mediterranean people. Waiting for all *that*, a kind of elegance we know nothing about, a slim-bellied Côte d'Azur thing we know absolutely nothing about.

Moreover, Kate's escapist dream of 'abroad' drifts further afield, to the East, where the sun rises: 'I'd like to go to the East, or somewhere like that, somewhere very hot, where you can lie under a mosquito net and breathe quite slowly. [...] somewhere where you can look through the flap of a tent and see sand' (p. 55). In this play, the pastoral is a middle-class dream come true, an elegant place where the characters have every basic requirement that they need: time, fresh air, exercise, food. Deeley says, 'You need good food in the country, substantial food, to keep you going' (p. 17). The country is a place of relief, nature and nurture. *Old Times* extends and establishes the whole world beyond England as a version of the pastoral, an alien territory which appeals to the women's fantasies but lays bare male insecurities.

Pinter, once again, evokes anti-pastoral images through male discourse. In the draft, Deeley asks Anna:

Don't you find it pretty damp in England? All the cows mooing and the pigs snorting, and all the mud, and all the dung, I mean I'm cognisant with the fact that you get dung in Sicily, naturally, but don't tell me that Sicilian dung is damp. It's not damp. Never in a million years.

Once more, Pinter is portraying a typical, sad relationship: despite the class differences, Kate and Deeley's marriage is reminiscent of Beth and Duff's in *Landscape*. Deeley, like Duff, tries to stimulate his wife, in terms, which are culturally, far more ambitious than Duff's, but just as inadequate; whereas, their relationship is almost over for Kate. Like Beth, Kate is a recluse; she likes to take long walks alone by the beach: 'Raincoat on. Off down the lane, hands deep in pockets' (p. 20). Predictably, Deeley describes Kate in domestic terms. In the draft he says: '[Kate] loves pots, steam, all that sort of stuff.' He pictures her as a faithful wife, indeed 'a classic female figure': 'She would have gone, if I had told her to go. But I asked her to stay and she did.'¹⁰⁵ However, unlike Beth, who sees the imaginary landscapes through the poetic melancholy of her memory, Kate, through her tactile images of the soil, succeeds in dominating the fantasy-reality of Anna's city. And at the end of the play, she conquers both Anna and Deeley's mental landscapes. She reveals an absolute and savage pastoral environment as she describes her relationship to her husband with overwrought images. The pastoral is a very real and potentially brutal part of their relationship and desires. The end is bitter and cruel, and Anna's 'apartness' and stillness is her strength.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Pinter is an architect of interiorised spaces in which a moving structure of scenic images signifies the psyche of the individual. His characters explore and map the geography of their minds. As Anna, Kate and Deeley contest their linguistic places, which are mythical representations of metropolis and country, Kate's nature finally dislocates Anna and Deeley's city of self-estrangement.

Landscape, Silence and *Old Times* are juxtapositions of repeated images, memories, fantasies and associations. In these plays, Pinter evokes human alienation (both in the city and in the country) in a poetic way. He places male in opposition to female, youth in opposition to age, city in opposition to country. The contrast between the city and the country is parallel to the contrast between male and female. While, mainly, Pinter's women use language as a cause for celebration, his men use language as a cause for despair. The delicate, musical, lyrical female language is battered by the violent, frustrated, insecure male language. While the women withdraw into a fantasy world of sexuality, 'nature', and memory, the men's view of sexuality is blatantly obscene, inferior, and insulting. Pinter explores his characters' multiple selves in these plays. Men have contrary temperaments and contrary choices (city/country); they cannot control, possess or match women. The characters re-imagine a long-gone past life of passion, romance and sexuality. While women locate this desire in an unlimited fantasy landscape, men encounter anger and resentment in an urban world - a symbol of the desires and dreads of modern life.

CHAPTER TWO: 'LONDON - THE ENORMOUS CAVERN'

The plays analysed in this chapter are all set in London. These plays, which Pinter wrote between 1975 and 1980 (*No Man's Land* to *Victoria Station*), map a virtual London that traps and sustains the characters in its 'civilised' discontented world. Pinter starts in the North with his successful writers 'above' the city in *No Man's Land*, and moves down to the centre of the city to depict working and living in the palpable streets and cafes in *Betrayal*. He continues his journey through London and arrives at the inner city locations in *Family Voices* and *Victoria Station* to represent a 'community' of isolation in the metropolis.

Despite its anti-spatial location *A Kind of Alaska* is included in this chapter. *A Kind of Alaska* is important as Pinter continues to portray the contradictions between male and female spaces. Through the female character's language and memory, Pinter explores the space in the mind/the unconsciousness that is both alien and universal, and feminine.

No Man's Land: No Woman's Land

I know the place.

It is true.

Everything we do

Corrects the space

Between death and me

And you.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Pinter, *Collected Poems and Prose*, p. 42.

Pinter wrote *No Man's Land* and his brief poem 'I know the place' in 1975. The poem summarises the tactics of Pinter's memory plays: their drawing the audience's attention to a spatiality that is private, subjective and internal. In the delimited performance stage, Pinter's characters journey to their internal psychic spaces, and locate themselves in both fictional and entirely actual places. Though the threat of physical violence seems as real as it did in *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, and *The Homecoming*, in *No Man's Land*, the stage space, enclosed/locked by door and heavy curtains, is secondary to the fictional narrative spaces. As with the previous memory plays, the true battleground in *No Man's Land*, is not the comfortable room but the dangerous territory of the protagonists' memories.¹⁰⁷ These characters' narratives are ascribed and dominated by offstage locales - from the concrete world of contemporary London, to further, foreign places: Hampstead Heath, Chalk Farm, Oxford, West Upfield, Siam, Bali, Amsterdam, Dijon, Hungary, Rumania. *No Man's Land*, like the preceding *Landscape*, *Silence* and *Old Times*, continues the shift in Pinter's spatial attention from mimesis to diegesis, and embodies and contests offstage places through the characters' linguistic, mythical geography.

No Man's Land, like *The Caretaker*, shows the audience an exclusively male world. But this time, Pinter locates several isolated versions of masculinity in a middle-class Hampstead milieu. The protagonists are successful people; they are 'above' the city, in 'A large room in a house in North West London'. The play's setting verifies Pinter's move from East London to North London, from menace to mannerism, from working-class environments towards an urbane world of intellectual and professional middle-class culture. This all-male play introduces a witty, refined upper-class language via its

¹⁰⁷ The references to *No Man's Land* are from *Plays: Three* (London: Methuen, 1984).

Oxford-educated protagonists who are from a literary environment: Hirst is a 'poet', 'an essayist', 'a critic', 'a man of letters', and Spooner, ('the proudest and most arrogant man you can imagine'¹⁰⁸) is a would-be 'Bohemian', a poet and a painter. Having said that, the play establishes Pinter's expertise in various classes of language. David L. Hirst rightly links it to the comedy of the late seventeenth century and its inheritance: 'The opposition of the manners of the country and the town in the comedy of the late seventeenth century has given way here, as in *The Homecoming*, to a conflict of the different social classes.'¹⁰⁹ Foster reminds Spooner that 'This is another class. It's another realm of operation. [...] It's organisation' (p. 111). However, Spooner points out the deceit of judging by appearances when he is rejected by Hirst: 'If I were wearing a suit such as your own you would see me in a different light' (p. 146). The play also presents an unrefined, aggressive language through its lower-class characters, Foster and Briggs; and the two literary gentlemen themselves constantly slip into vulgarity, obscenity and street slang. In its own way, *No Man's Land* reworks Pinter's fascination with the strange interdependency of male aggression and something 'finer'. Mimetically, the play portrays drawing-room decorum; yet linguistically, it is violent, threatening, and coarse. However, the major outbreak of violence is performed not by the 'guards', or the 'intruder', but by the privileged, drunken Hirst when he throws his glass at Spooner.

Pinter has always been fascinated by male friendship, which is wildly betrayed by male competition. He re-imagines the world of *The Dwarfs*. *No Man's Land* shows a common preoccupation with this earlier work. The young would-be-writers show the

¹⁰⁸ Peter Hall, *Peter Hall's Diaries: The Story of a Dramatic Battle*, ed. by John Goodwin (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), p. 157.

¹⁰⁹ David L. Hirst, *Comedy of Manners*, Critical Idiom, no. 40 (London: 1979), p. 80.

same kind of competitiveness as the old, established, famous writers of *No Man's Land*. Both plays offer a portrait of male bonding, prodigiously betrayed because of competitiveness. Len, Pete, and Mark are forever talking about art. They have wildly varying opinions on the function of art and the role of the artist. Pete describes male friendship as an 'abortion' (*The Dwarfs*, p. 174). Pete confesses to Mark as Spooner would to Hirst:

The point is, I've admired. I've admired you on the war-path. I've stayed in the hunt because I've enjoyed killing with you, however many rats I may have smelt. Because that's the sort of bloke, the sort of jackal I can be too. I smile, I think that's a good smile, I look in the mirror to see what it's like. So you never got me on your kitchen staff. I played you at the same time. It's all been a dirty doublecross. Sure I've used you. (*The Dwarfs*, p. 177).

There are no winners in Pinter's male world, as Pete tells Mark, 'You may have lost but I haven't won. That's what you want to get into your nut' (*The Dwarfs*, p. 177).

Hirst hosts Spooner in his 'remarkably pleasant' ('safe from all dangers') house after having met him, apparently for the first time, in a pub by Hampstead Heath. Unlike Hirst, Spooner does not have material wealth; however, he claims to be in a more advantageous position as he is 'fixed' and 'concrete', 'free', 'a man of experience', and 'a man of intelligence and perception'. Spooner is the *flâneur*, he is displaced: a wandering, 'meandering' outsider, and 'a captive to memories', who describes a fantasy world of recollections (which may never have happened) in order to gain power. Spooner, who 'often hangs about Hampstead Heath, expecting nothing', attempts to invade Hirst's narrative space in order to squat in his mental landscape. The simple territorial conflict of *The Caretaker* has become deliberately opaque and perplexing; Spooner's aim is to invade the audience's consciousness, too.

Spooner offers himself as a friend; he talks about Hirst's wife, 'You've lost her. [...] She will no more come back to you' (p. 96). At this moment, Hirst refers, in a kind of drunken litany, to a metaphorical 'no man's land...does not move...or change...or grow old... remains...forever...icy...silent'. Hirst locates his present life in a no man's land, as he falls and crawls out of the room. Julia Kristeva emphasises the importance of the function and the position of the female for men; she argues that the 'woman effect' is 'an effect which has neither power nor a language system, but is their mute support'.¹¹⁰ In *No Man's Land*, Pinter emphasises male insecurity in the absence of woman. Again, Alice Rayner suggests that the title refers to a no man's land as 'the absence and the presence of the female who presides over the space where no man belongs.'¹¹¹ The sexually evocative friction between the female and the male of *Old Times* is, here, replaced by the arid and sterile friction between men who vacillate between baroque verbal fantasies and simple brutality.

Pinter maps diverse psychic spaces through his characters' fictitious offstage locales in *No Man's Land*. These diegetic spaces collaborate to depict a gloomy contemporary London. Hirst and Spooner's pastoral paradise, a lost bucolic Edwardian era, defines the present post-war urban hell. Their dialogue about the war (a no woman's land) establishes a masculine milieu. Indirectly, Pinter presents the war as one cause of the protagonists' social displacement in London. In this play, the indoors may suggest a shelter after the war, as much as it symbolises the mind of Spooner.

¹¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, 'Die Produktivität der Frau: Interview mit Elaine Boucquey' in *Das Lächeln der Medusa* (Germany: 1976), pp. 166-72.

¹¹¹ Alice Rayner, 'Harold Pinter: Narrative and Presence', *Theatre Journal*, 40.4(December, 1988), pp. 482-97 (p. 493).

The characters continue to draw dystopian and utopian landscapes. The long-established view of the city as community has yielded to the city as solitude in *No Man's Land*. The characters' speeches, which are about a run-down and seedy urban underworld, present London as incoherent, and disorientating. All the characters go through an urban experience in which they find themselves displaced in the social order. The play's mental city is the compound of their imaginations, and it is inevitably a city of incompatibility and contradiction.

Hirst's house becomes for Spooner 'a house of silence and strangers' and (with the arrival of Foster and Briggs Hirst's secretary and servant) of threat. They repeatedly, ominously threaten Spooner whom they judge by his shabby clothes: Spooner cannot be Hirst's friend, because he is not 'typical'. Foster is a characteristically displaced urban character who 'travels incognito' (p. 97), whose aim is to find 'the right niche and be happy' (p. 114), to find a space where he fits. He is after a suitable place in life. He apparently despises Hirst ('I could make another life. I don't want to waste my time looking after a pisshound' (p. 114)). Yet he stays in the expectation of inheriting wealth; he tells Spooner that Hirst is his father. He acts and talks pretentiously (he calls himself an 'amanuensis' rather than a lowly secretary), whereas Briggs employs simpler, more direct language to invade Spooner's narrative space, and declares that he has seen Spooner before: 'Yes. You collect the beermugs from the tables in a pub in Chalk Farm' (p. 99). Spooner justifies himself: 'The landlord's a friend of mine. When he's shorthanded, I give him a helping hand' (p. 99). For although, like a typical early Pinter duo, Foster and Briggs put Spooner, the outsider, into scenes to make him uncomfortable, to exclude him, Spooner knows how to handle them. He invites them to his imaginary country house where they 'would receive the warmest of welcomes'

from his wife and two daughters (p. 103); he tantalises them by playing with the fantasies that baffled the men in *Landscape*, *Silence* and *Old Times*.

The characters refer to local places, some of which portray a concept of the urban complex as a maze. London is drawn as a network of streets. The street becomes their dwelling; they view and experience the city of the streets like the *flâneur*. In the British Library draft, it is clear that Spooner is a man of the streets:

B- You can go now.

A- Go where?

B- Home.

A- Home is a long way away. Beyond my reach.

B- You live in London?

A- An enormous cavern, London. At this hour. Full of pavement.

B- You are not within striking distance.

A- Should you wish to strike, I am within your distance.

B- I mean your home is not within striking distance?

A- No. It is not.

B- Sleep here, then.

A- Thank you.¹¹²

The inner city in Briggs's narration becomes the locus of man's alienation. In his long speech about the time Foster asked him the way to Bolsover Street, the city is mapped as a set of unpredictable and dangerous labyrinths. Briggs tells Spooner that he met Foster at a street corner:

I told him Bolsover Street was in the middle of an intricate one-way system. It was a one-way system easy enough to get into. The only trouble was that, once you are in, you couldn't get

¹¹² *The Pinter Archive*, Box no. 39 (*No Man's Land*).

out. I told him his best bet, if he really wanted to get to Bolsover Street, was to take the first left, first right, second right, third on the left, keep his eye open for a hardware shop, go right round the square, keeping to the inside lane, take the second Mews on the right and then stop. He will find himself facing a very tall office block, with a crescent courtyard. He can take advantage of this office block. He can go round the crescent, come out the other way, follow the arrows, go past two sets of traffic lights and take the next left indicated by the first green filter he comes across. He's got the Post Office Tower in his vision the whole time. All he's got to do is to reverse into the underground car park, change gear, go straight on, and he'll find himself in Bolsover Street with no trouble at all. I did warn him, though, that he'll still be faced with the problem, having found Bolsover Street, of losing it. (p. 120).

After the Old Vic premiere, Harold Hobson's 'simple inquisitiveness' actually made him drive in and out of Bolsover Street to find out if what Briggs 'says about it is true.' Hobson's conclusion was 'that Briggs is not speaking the truth...Bolsover Street is not in the least baffling', it was 'a perfectly ordinary thoroughfare.'¹¹³ This was an informative experiment, but of course it misunderstood Pinter's methods, which he had already made clear in 1962:

I'm speaking with some reluctance, knowing that there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you're standing at the time or on what the weather's like. [...] We will all interpret a common experience quite differently, though we prefer to subscribe to the view that there's a shared common ground, a known ground. I think there's a shared common ground all right, but that's more like quicksand.¹¹⁴

Briggs's interpretation of Bolsover Street is a product of his memory, and fantasy. It would not be practical to try to resolve the degree of parity between Pinter's vision of London and the topographical city; he simply surveys the self-estranged city as his

¹¹³ Harold Hobson, 'Unanswered Questions', *The Sunday Times*, 4 May 1975, p. 39.

¹¹⁴ Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre', a speech made by Pinter at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, 1962, Introduction to *Plays: One*. Reprinted in *Modern British Drama*, ed. by Henry Popkin (New York: 1964), pp. 574-77.

character, Briggs, records illusive images. Fifteen years later, Hobson's successor at *The Sunday Times* offered subtler comments when he argued that Briggs uses Bolsover Street as a means of 'intimidation'. He asserts that the speech 'is like a machine: it is designed not to tell a story or to create a reality but to perform a function. The words ambush you with an intent which is quite different from what they mean'.¹¹⁵ Briggs tries to trap Spooner with his narrative. He presents himself as the true master of the city and of the house, with the power to define relationships, and to exclude Spooner - the outsider, the man of the streets.

According to Briggs the city contains complex road systems, which forever trap the victim; and it contains a mysterious inner city:

I knew one or two people who'd been wandering up and down Bolsover Street for years.

They'd wasted their bloody youth there. The people who live there, their faces are grey, they're in a state of despair, but nobody pays any attention' (p. 120).

For the first time, Briggs's description depicts the no man's land, which is impossible to escape and yet impossible to define: 'The realm of the unpresentable, a landscape of the psyche.'¹¹⁶ Yet he is also caught in an onstage role, as a mere servant, and so Spooner, too, can present himself as a man of influence. As he drinks the champagne Briggs serves, Spooner boasts of his own expertise: 'I know my wines. [...] I made many trips to Dijon, for the winetasting, with my French translator.' Spooner attempts to entice Briggs into this narrative: 'You will wonder of course what he translated. The answer is my verse. I am a poet' (p. 121). He continues to try to impress Briggs of his mastery of language ('Translating verse is an extremely difficult task. Only the Rumanians remain respectable exponents of the craft' (p. 122)). But Briggs is simply

¹¹⁵ John Peter, 'Harold Pinter: The Poet of No-man's Land', *The Sunday Times*, 7 October 1990, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ John Lutterbie, 'Subjects of Silence', *Theatre Journal*, 40.4(December 1988), pp. 468-81 (p. 469).

not interested: 'Bit early in the morning for all this, isn't it?'¹¹⁷ And so it goes on - remorselessly, because without a woman in the play there can be no real focus for the men's desires, and therefore no final moment of victory - or rather of defeat. Once again in Pete's words: 'You may have lost but I haven't won' (*The Dwarfs*, p. 177).

The characters calculatedly manipulate each other. Each wants to be the dominant possessor of the space. Yet they are actually so fragile and paranoid that they interpret any kind of discourse as a threat. Foster is terrified of losing his place in Hirst's house and tells Spooner, whom he sees as a rival, not to 'try to drive a wedge into a happy household' (p. 112). Spooner constantly creates new appearances and strategies to suit - he hopes - his listener. He offers 'scrupulously honest' help with Foster's poetry; and in the first act, he offers himself to Hirst as a friend: 'I am a relevant witness. I could be a friend' (p. 95). Hirst thinks he knows Spooner from somewhere; Spooner 'thought [Hirst's] face was familiar' (p. 125). So the first act is a prophecy and prepares the audience for what is to come in the second act.

When the psychological locale shifts to Oxford and a fantastic, genteel past, Hirst takes Spooner to be 'Charles Whetherby', a former friend from his Oxford years - a squash player, a 'wise, sensible chap'. Hirst narrates fragments of 'memories'. He talks about his friend's wife, Emily, and confesses that he 'fell in love with her once upon a time', that he 'plied her with buttered scones, Wiltshire cream, crumpets and strawberries', to which she eventually 'succumbed', and 'rented a little cottage for the summer [...] that

¹¹⁷ Spooner continues his manoeuvres as he says he has to attend a board meeting of a recently inaugurated poetry magazine. He talks about 'Lord Lancer of Norman descent', 'a man of culture', 'a man of honour', who is also attending the board meeting. Temporarily, Spooner gets Briggs into his linguistic game of fantasy, which is evident, as Briggs offers him a job as a patron to Foster, who is also a poet. Spooner uses various tactics and manages to present himself as a man of the world who has been to many different places.

summer she was mine, while you imagined her to be solely yours' (p. 128). Spooner is more at home in Hirst's ageing imagination than in Bolsover Street and joins in with his game of memories; he embodies a virtual Charles Whetherby. As John Lutterbie explains, 'Spooner cannot be concretely objectified but continually oscillates between various fragmented positions.'¹¹⁸ As Hirst and Spooner cast and recast each other in scenes of obscure sexuality at Oxford (a location which itself excludes Briggs and Foster), Spooner fits himself into shifting roles. They talk and argue about common friends and lovers; they create a fantasy-reality to dominate each other with their past and parallel associations, and betrayals. Hirst tries to dominate Spooner through plain self-centredness ('Of course I was successful very early' (p. 128)), and he boasts of having been in 'Military Intelligence' during the war (p. 129). Then their co-operative fanciful narratives turn into a row; they condemn and accuse each other of immoral sexual practices. Eventually, Hirst tells Spooner that he is 'prepared to be patient. I shall be kind to you', and might even show Spooner his 'photograph album', let him truly enter his past:

You might even see a face in it which might remind you of your own, of what you once were. You might see faces of others, in shadow, or cheeks of others, turning, or jaws, or backs of necks, or eyes, dark under hats, which might remind you of others, whom once you knew, whom you thought long dead, but from whom you will still receive a sidelong glance, if you can face the good ghost. They possess all that emotion...trapped. Bow to it. It will assuredly never release them, but who knows...what relief...it may give to them...who knows how they may quicken...in their chains, in their glass jars. You think it cruel...to quicken them, when they are fixed, imprisoned? No...no. Deeply, deeply, they wish to respond to your touch, to your look, and when you smile, their joy...is unbounded. And so I say to you, tender the dead, as you would yourself be tendered, now, in what you would describe as your life. (p. 137).

¹¹⁸ Lutterbie, p. 472.

Hirst is absorbed in his significant definition of his dead friends' 'glass jars', and how, actually, the dead can be animated and can respond to a worldly 'touch' and 'look': the dead are alive in him. However, Briggs dismisses them: 'The blank dead'. Spooner takes advantage of this controversy between Hirst and Briggs, and offers himself as Hirst's secretary, further displacing Briggs and Foster in the present. Spooner admires the photograph album, and offers him help to put names to the faces. Briggs and Foster interrupt and tell Spooner that the faces of the dead, of the inhabitants of Hirst's lost pre-urban world are nameless and 'they'll always be nameless'. Spooner still offers himself to Hirst ('Let me live with you and be your secretary'), but now Hirst simply ignores him, and Spooner becomes the comic victim of his own need to please:

HIRST Is there a big fly in here? I here buzzing.

SPOONER No.

HIRST You say no.

SPOONER Yes. (p. 146).

Lucina Gabbard argues that Hirst exists in a still point, 'The blur between drinking and passing out'.¹¹⁹ She also argues that Hirst 'confuses people of today with people from yesterday'.¹²⁰ Yet as this dialogue between Hirst and Spooner shows, Hirst is actually more calculated, conscious, and conclusive than he seems at first. Hirst, too, uses the other's confusion to advance his own strategy. Despite the protagonists' common ground they actually did not know each other at Oxford: to quote Peter Hall 'They pretend they did as a weapon'.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Lucina P. Gabbard, *The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), p. 253.

¹²⁰ Gabbard, 'The Pinter Surprise', in *Harold Pinter*, ed. by Steven H. Gale (London: Associated University Press, 1986), pp. 175-86 (p. 184).

¹²¹ Hall, *Diaries*, p. 160.

Pinter's characters create 'realities' and they either accept or deface each other's made-up truths. Again, Peter Hall pointed out that with Pinter, 'Words are weapons that the characters use to discomfort or destroy each other, and in defence to conceal feelings.'¹²² Spooner creates various stories about his experience, his strength, his knowledge of Europe, his 'highly sensitive judgement', and he even offers himself to Hirst as a 'boatman' of 'rare quality' (p. 95). He might emerge as, like Deeley in *Old Times*, trying to find superiority through 'distance'; or on the other hand, he might appear to be the victim of his own imagination. But he is the ultimate champion of the game. He is the only one who has managed to keep his distance, to be objective and to see the reality of his companions: he says, 'What is obligatory to keep in your vision is space' (p. 81). Although he contributes to Hirst's description of 'no man's land' at the end of the play, he actually has not lost anything, he is still a free man, a joyful passer-by of the streets, who will most probably go back to collecting beermugs in Chalk Farm. He is ultimately a poet. He is the poet-*flâneur*, the observer of the streets, interested in where he is eternally present and active. So he will move on. The other characters with their need for possessions, territory and status will continue to remain, to be 'stuck' in no man's land, forever.

Thus the characters play a fiercely-contested game of space, reminiscent of *The Homecoming*. In *No Man's Land*, they compete both to exclude one another from scenes and attempt to invite the others into their private games. Their narrative spaces are both empty and full, like the interior spaces described all through the play - the 'gap', for instance, which Hirst 'can't fill'. No man's land never moves, never changes;

¹²² Gussow, *Conversations*, Introduction, p. 11.

as Pinter put it, 'What is so different about the stage is that you're just there, stuck.'¹²³ The play is definitely not 'an elaborate spoof' as Peter Thomson suggested.¹²⁴ It is about Pinter's unique approach to the enclosing architecture of mimetic stage space - a theatre confined within walls - and how he overcomes it and dominates it via his characters' monumental linguistic offstage locales, which only the city can inspire.

No Man's Land still, of course, evokes a lost world of grace, nature, and pastoral memories/dreams, the realm of women and country. These men are displaced and alienated by their own metropolitan life. Hirst and Spooner both inhabit the same landscape, a vision of inhuman alienation – a no man's land. Their present alienation forces them to associate themselves with a linguistic escapism. Their memories and fantasies describe - with a celebratory attitude - an idyllic, ideal, charming English past. They create pastoral landscapes to protect themselves against the disorder of their present lives and indulge in nostalgic dreams, fictions of a happier past.

They retreat into a comforting location. This play presents the pastoral through a network of old myths, including a nationalistic sense of a lost English bucolic life. Spooner and Hirst describe the public space of Edwardian times when England was at its most prosperous and when the English language 'colonised' the world. On the edge of old age, they discuss the lost English myth; and now all they have left is the 'English language' (p. 80). In his shadowy past, Spooner kept an open house for young poets in a country cottage where he lived an idyllic life with a courteous wife:

¹²³ Lawrence M. Bensky, 'The Art of the Theatre III', interview, *Paris Review*, 10(1966), pp. 13-37 (p. 20).

¹²⁴ Peter Thomson, 'Harold Pinter: A Retrospect', *Critical Quarterly*, 20(Winter 1978), pp. 21-29 (p. 26).

I keep open house. Young poets come to me. They read me their verses. I comment, give them coffee, make no charge. Women are admitted, some of whom are also poets. Some are not. But with the windows open to the garden, my wife pouring long glasses of squash, with ice, on a summer evening, young voices occasionally lifted in unaccompanied ballad, young bodies lying in the dying light, my wife moving through the shadows in her long gown, what can ail? I mean who can gainsay us? What quarrel can be found with what is, *au fond*, a gesture towards the sustenance and preservation of art, and through art to virtue? (pp. 89-90).

The play works in motifs, images, and clichés, borrowed from Pinter's screen adaptation of L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*, in which the narrator reminisces about the summer he spent as a child in the country; a summer of teas on the lawn and games of tennis and cricket, now preserved but shrunk into fading photographs in Hirst's album.

Nostalgically, Spooner re-creates that vision of cottages, lawns; and at this point, Hirst makes the first reference to his own past, and contributes to Spooner's bucolic world. For he, too, gave tea to visitors on the lawn at his cottage:

SPOONER You've revealed something. You've made an unequivocal reference to your past. Don't go back on it. We share something. A memory of the bucolic life. We're both English.

Pause

HIRST In the village church, the beams are hung with garlands, in honour of young women of the parish, reputed to have died virgin.

Pause

However, the garlands are not bestowed on maidens only, but on all who died unmarried, wearing the white flower of a blameless life.

Both Spooner and Hirst share the same image of a lost rustic Eden, an age of innocence - where stability, traditional values, and the locus of true Englishness were

located. But there is always a serpent in the garden. Pinter mocks their lamentation for a lost age of innocence through his half-caricatured protagonists; when Spooner starts talking about Hirst's wife of 'hazel eyes', '*HIRST throws his glass at him, ineffectually*' (p. 94); and later, he '*crawls out of the door*' (p. 96).

Foster and Briggs have different fantasies - of other, distant, worlds of delight. Foster evokes a private landscape in 'Siam or Bali' where the women 'loved him at first sight'. Spooner easily rests the scene from Briggs and Foster, and replaces it with his own geography, twisting their verbal attack to suit himself:

FOSTER (to SPOONER) You're not Siamese though, are you?

BRIGGS He's a very long way from being Siamese.

FOSTER Ever been out there?

SPOONER I've been to Amsterdam.

[FOSTER and BRIGGS stare at him.] (p. 101).

Spooner quickly dominates the arena with a picturesque evocation of Amsterdam via a canal, a waiter, a child, a fisherman, two lovers and a whistling observer. He uses this animated image as proof of his European cultural sophistication, as a weapon. He formulates an eye-catching view of Amsterdam beyond the grasp of Briggs and Foster. He captures their attention with this picturesque scene, in which the joy of the *flâneur*'s gaze is triumphant. He invites them to his house in the country to show them his collection of paintings, turning them for the moment into the servants of his imagination.

It is at this point that Hirst wakes up from his slumber. He remembers a depressive dream of a waterfall in which someone was drowning. Now the pastoral imagery is agonising:

Shadows. Brightness of a waterfall through leaves. Gambolling. In the bushes. Young lovers. A fall of water. It was my dream. The lake. Who was drowning in my dream? It was blinding. [...] It was freezing. There is a gap in me. I can't fill it. There's a flood running through me. I can't plug it. They're blotting me out. Who is doing it? I'm suffocating. It's a muff. A muff, perfumed. Someone is doing me to death. (p. 108).

Pinter strips away his protagonist's escapist, self-idealising mental landscape, and finally exposes a stark and terrifying wasteland - a dark pastoral - with bodies in the water.

No Man's Land offers opposites and parallels: town against country, the escapist dream of 'abroad' against London life. Foster is unhappy in the big city ('I can't take the pace in London' (p. 113)); and sex is part of his fantasy world of 'abroad': 'I miss the Siamese girls. I miss the girls in Bali' (p. 113). But then he tells Spooner of his experience in another kind of wasteland, the Australian desert, where he saw a man walking along carrying two umbrellas on a beautiful day. Foster chose not to speak to him, not to ask him 'what he was up to' because he 'decided that [the man] must be some kind of lunatic. I thought he would only confuse me' (p. 115). Foreign places, in Pinter, expose the apparent arbitrariness and ambiguity of events and manners, and sharpen the choices people face when they encounter what seems alien. In this case, Foster simply refuses to look beyond the surface.

Briggs is content with the masculinist concrete city - there is a maze, but he has the street-map - but in the second act, Hirst and Spooner's narrative spaces are dominated by the dangerous territory of their memories. Hirst sets his relationship with Spooner's wife in a country house. He describes the charms of the country. Having described all the pastoral picnics, loves and betrayals, the two men continue, metaphorically, to project rural films of the past. Again the pastoral is associated with female delicacy, as in *Landscape*, but in this all-male play the old men claim to possess it, introducing teasing innuendo. Hirst explores his own delight in the natural as he talks about Spooner's wife: 'She loved the cottage. She loved the flowers. As did I. Narcissi, crocus, dog's tooth violets, fuchsia, jonquils, pinks, verbenas. [...] Her delicate hands. [...] I'll never forget her way with jonquils' (p. 128). The female remains a landscape, a focal point upon which the men continue to struggle. But as Hirst plays with words, sudden darkness intrudes into the idyll of memory. His mental journey explores 'blackened' 'tennis balls' 'under the dead leaves', behind the riverbanks and cricket pitches.

As Hirst's helpers make him change the subject 'for the last time', he once more tries to interpret his mental landscape. But his dream only reveals the anxiety behind his repression:

I'm walking towards a lake. Someone is following me, through the trees. I lose him, easily. I see a body in the water, floating. I am excited. I look closer and see I was mistaken. There is nothing in the water. I say to myself, I saw a body drowning. But I am mistaken. There is nothing there. (p. 153).

The play starts with a London summer and ends with rural winter. For these characters, the no man's land they describe is as insecure as the outer world around them.

Although the play is a savage satire about 'literary life' in the metropolis, the stage set - the hermetic world of a senile writer's North London house - is invaded by offstage landscapes: the summer evening gatherings at a country cottage where Spooner and his wife entertained young poets, a picturesque moment in Amsterdam, a ceremony involving garlands in a village church, a dream in which someone may be drowning in a waterfall or a lake, cricketers in action at Lord's just before the war, Hirst's idyllic affair with Spooner's wife Emily, and a photograph album - all of which the characters describe so graphically, so poetically. Pinter's successful male protagonists are 'above' the city, sealed in their private landscapes, locked in the north of London. While Hirst is dominated by his servants (a theme Pinter explored in his film script *The Servant*), Spooner is dislocated in this 'enormous cavern, full of pavement'. Pinter evokes a terrifying no woman's land, in which man is a voyeur, a lonely figure haunting the streets of London - the evocative figure of the *flâneur*. *No Man's Land* is a game of constructing memories and associating fantasies. The play traces the subjective experiences of its characters' being, moving and witnessing - in the city.

Living in the City: *Betrayal* and the Realistic/Cinematic Presentation of Theatrical Space

It was originally written for the stage in a kind of cinematic way, with a structure that possibly owes something to the films I've worked on for the last twenty years. My early plays started at the beginning and went to the end; they were linear. Then I did more and more films, and I felt that *Betrayal* - even the stage version - comes as much out of film as it does out of the stage.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Leslie Bennets, 'On Film: Pinter's *Betrayal* Displays New Subtleties', *New York Times*, 27 February 1983, sec. H, pp. 1 and 23.

Pinter concentrated heavily on cinema after *No Man's Land*, and the influence of cinema is strong in *Betrayal*.¹²⁶ The play's short scenes, set at various times and locations, make the play more akin to Pinter's film-scripts than his stage-plays. *Betrayal* is unique, radical, and it presented a major change in Pinter's use of theatrical space.

Betrayal departs from the earlier 'Pinteresque' plays because it verifies and illustrates the past in its nine scenes. Instead of the subjective narratives of his earlier plays, *Betrayal* truly shows the story line as if through the objective viewpoint of a camera. It is different from the other memory plays where the past is enacted through subjective/imaginary perceptions and only replaces the present linguistically (*Silence*, *Old Times*), or where the past is described through a subjective narrator (*Landscape*, *No Man's Land*). *Betrayal* portrays the past factually - in the flesh, in 'real' time and place. In the previous memory plays, the characters were in total command of the past, but here the omniscient eye of the playwright/camera records an incontestable image of the past. Contrary to the other plays, there is actually very little diegesis; as the off-stage narrative scenes locate themselves back in time, almost every diegetic detail is made mimetic. *Betrayal* is the only Pinter play where the diegetic world of the characters becomes cinematic/visual.

Like *No Man's Land*, and up to a point *Old Times*, *Betrayal* is about the intellectual, professional middle-class, its manners, and its discontents. After the exclusive male world of *No Man's Land*, *Betrayal* locates woman in a man's world. Jerry was educated at Cambridge and works as a literary agent; Robert went to Oxford and

¹²⁶ The references to *Betrayal* are from *Plays: Three* (London: Methuen, 1984).

works as a publisher; Robert's wife Emma runs an art gallery. The play is a very realistically told story of adultery among these characters, who belong to the London literary elite. It is a portrait of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, in which, according to Pinter, men consider their relationships with each other more important than their relationships with women. Pinter again portrays masculinity through the relationships of the publishing world, in which men attempt to exclude women from the public arena and live according to rituals: lunching out, playing squash. Pinter depicts male brutality, through Robert's violence to Emma. He confesses to Jerry, 'It's true I've hit Emma once or twice. But that wasn't to defend a principle. I wasn't inspired to do it from any kind of moral standpoint. I just felt like giving her a good bashing. The old itch' (p. 185). The city in *Betrayal*, as in *No Man's Land* and *Old Times*, is a male fantasy, constructed and explored through male discourse and rituals.

The characters in *Betrayal* are not locked in by the rooms of their psychic spaces. They refer to real, solid, local places and can move among them. The play consists of nine scenes, which are located concretely and briefly: Pub. 1977. Spring; Jerry's House. Study. 1977. Spring; Flat. 1975. Winter; Robert and Emma's House. Living room. 1974. Autumn; Hotel Room. Venice. 1973. Summer; Flat. 1973. Summer; Restaurant. 1973. Summer; Flat. 1971. Summer; Robert and Emma's House. Bedroom. 1968. Winter. Pinter now portrays a social world far removed from that of Mick, Aston and Davies. By the time Pinter came to write *Betrayal*, eighteen years after *The Caretaker*, the process of establishing the set is not done in the same kind of realistic/absurdist detail. Pinter revolutionises his use of limiting theatrical space and creates various real and virtual places: hotel rooms, pubs, and restaurants. The characters talk in solid and detailed terms about the streets and the districts of London, almost as a way of talking

about their affairs. In *Betrayal*, Pinter's characters refer to real locales like Hampstead, Kilburn, Soho. The action of drama is achieved by real people maturing in 'real' time and space - or rather regressing, because of course, although *Betrayal* is like a film, its reels are in the wrong order: we journey backwards into the past, verifying it and for once seeing precisely *how* memories and lies will distort it.

Pinter draws a nauseous picture of a bourgeois society where all the values have gone wrong. The play portrays a way of life based on an infinite number of betrayals and adulteries. In the late 1970s, Pinter seemed locked in the same milieu as his characters: he presents a chaotic web of lies that form the social relationships of people related to the literary world of London; all the characters are members of a network of cultural production where none of them create. Instead, they are involved in their deceits and intrigues. Pinter depicts an artistic London in which art is not life-fulfilling: Robert confesses:

I hate books. Or to be more precise, prose. Or to be even more precise, modern prose, I mean modern novels, first novels and second novels, all that promise and sensibility it falls upon me to judge, to put the firm's money on, and then to push for the third novel, see it done, see the dust jacket done, see the dinner for the national literary editors done, see the signing at Hatchards done, see the lucky author cook himself to death, all in the name of literature. (pp. 249-50).

Pinter is largely concerned with male bonding in *Betrayal*; he describes it as 'about a nine-year relationship between two men who are best friends.'¹²⁷ In their undergraduate years, Robert and Jerry used to send each other the writings of Ford Madox Ford, who

¹²⁷ Billington, *The Life*, p. 263.

was also preoccupied with 'definitions of manliness, and male bonding'.¹²⁸ According to Ford 'Men seek protection from nurturing women and in abstract pastoral landscapes and feminine interiors.'¹²⁹ Indeed, Robert and Jerry precisely represent the typical man as defined by Ford - Robert is at ease with the pastoral landscape of Torcello, and Jerry used to be content in the feminine, nurturing interiors Emma provided.

The bonding between Jerry and Robert is more important for them than their relationship to Emma: man betraying man is the real betrayal in the play. David Jones, who made the film version, argued that the play is about 'male and female insecurities', and stressed that Pinter is writing about male insecurity faced by the 'destructive enigma called woman'.¹³⁰ Jerry describes a close relationship with Robert, remembering all those years, drinks, lunches. When Emma tells Jerry that her husband knows about their affair, Jerry is more alarmed because it reminds him that he has betrayed Robert:

JERRY You told him everything?

EMMA I had to.

JERRY You told him everything...about us?

EMMA I had to.

Pause

JERRY But he's my oldest friend. (p. 175).

Betrayal is a journey that starts at the end and goes to the beginning. Each scene is engineered according to the preceding one. The story line is not simply linear, but the

¹²⁸ Bette H. Kirschstein, 'Gender, Self and Society in Ford Madox Ford', *Dissertation Abstracts*, 1993.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Billington, *The Life*, p. 267.

audience is privileged to fill the gaps, and spot the lies. By seeing the story in reverse, the audience is introduced to more and more betrayals, and the theme of the play gradually unfolds.

The first scene takes place between Emma and her ex-lover Jerry in a pub, in the spring of 1977. Emma wants to see Jerry, with whom she had betrayed her husband for seven years. She tells Jerry - who is also her husband's oldest friend and was his best man - that her marriage with Robert is over, after a long night of confessions. Now she knows that Robert has betrayed her with other women for years.

The second scene takes place between Jerry and Robert, 'Later', in Jerry's house. Jerry is shocked once again when Robert tells him that he has actually known about the relationship for four years. The following scene takes place two years previously, in the flat they secretly share, Emma and Jerry's relationship is ending. Because of the art gallery she runs, Emma is not free in the afternoons, so they cannot see each other. They decide to give up the flat and sell the contents to the landlady. Through Emma's art gallery, Pinter emphasises a space in which important works are exhibited. He might also hint that visual art is mysterious: Emma's job involves visual art, versus Robert and Jerry whose jobs involve language.

As the play goes backwards in time for the second time, scene four presents the three protagonists together for the first time. Jerry drops in on Robert and Emma at home. Pinter reinforces the bond between the men as they, especially Robert, exclude Emma from the male territory of squash, shower and restaurant.

Scene five is set in a hotel room in Venice, in the summer of 1973. Emma and Robert have gotten away from the bustle of London. They are on holiday in Venice. They are excited about going to Torcello the following day. It is in this scene that Robert finds out about the betrayal, via Jerry's letter. He talks about Venetian people at the American Express, where they asked him to take the letter addressed to Emma. But Robert does not take it:

Just because my name is Downs and your name is Downs doesn't mean that we're the Mr and Mrs Downs that they, in their laughing Mediterranean way, assume we are. We could be, and in fact are vastly more likely to be, total strangers. So let's say I, whom they laughingly assume to be your husband, had taken the letter, having declared myself to be your husband but in truth being a total stranger, and opened it, and read it, out of nothing more than idle curiosity, and then thrown it in a canal, you would never have received it and would have been deprived of your legal right to open your own mail, and all this because of Venetian je m'en foutisme. I've a good mind to write to the Doge of Venice about it.

Pause

That's what stopped me taking it, by the way, and bringing it to you, the thought that I could very easily be a total stranger.

Pause

What they of course did not know, and had no way of knowing, was that I am your husband.
(p. 218).

Robert's words penetrate Emma's defences. Although Robert knows that the letter is from Jerry - he 'recognised the handwriting'- he makes her admit it herself. He manipulates and even paralyses her:

What do you think of Jerry as a letter writer?

She laughs shortly.

You're trembling. Are you cold? (p. 220).

Here they use words to conceal their feelings. However, their emotions have to be uncovered. As Robert investigates the 'quite well established' affair between his wife and his friend, Emma reveals that they have actually had a flat for five years. Robert continues to harass her, corners her with his words:

I've always liked Jerry. To be honest, I've always liked him rather more than I've liked you.
 Maybe I should have had an affair with him myself.

Silence

Tell me, are you looking forward to our trip to Torcello? (p. 225).

Pinter read the above scene at a British Council Conference in Cambridge (1999). He brought forward the dramatic tension of the scene through Robert's devious teasing of Emma as if he truly spitted out the words at an adulterous wife.

The following scene takes place after the holiday in Venice, and returns the audience to the flat. Jerry and Emma meet during their lunch break. They exchange news. Emma tells him that they did not go to Torcello because 'the speedboats were on strike' (p. 229). And Jerry talks about his panic when he could not remember where he put Emma's letter: 'I kept seeing it lying somewhere in the house, being picked up', but 'it was in the pocket of a jacket in my wardrobe - at home'. At this moment one half-expects Emma to tell him what happened in Venice and that Robert found out about their affair; but she does not.

The next scene is set in a restaurant; Jerry and Robert have their ritual lunch. Contradicting Emma's story, Robert says that he went for a trip to Torcello by speedboat.

The penultimate scene, which takes place in the flat, in the summer of 1971, portrays the heyday of the affair. The final scene depicts the beginning of the affair at a party in Robert and Emma's house in 1968. The audience now finds out that it all started casually, even accidentally, out of Jerry's drunkenness. Above all, the audience sees the husband come to the room and remain blind to what is going on; he even encourages the affair by leaving the two together. All the way through, the two men have mistreated and hurt the woman. Pinter pointed out that, 'The men also make certain betrayals. I wouldn't want it all to come down to the lady.'¹³¹ Contributing to the male world of *No Man's Land* with its vulgarity and aggression beneath elaborate verbal fantasies, *Betrayal* presents a picture of masculine ugliness and the everyday dread of modern life.

In *Betrayal*, the characters are stuck in the middle of the city. They long to get away from it. Emma and Jerry even adopt an assumed surname 'Green'; their liaison is an escape into the pastoral. Pastoral in this play is a formless desire and a clandestine escape into another room - a theatre of retreat. Emma and Robert go to scenic Venice. They leave the disturbance and disorder of city streets behind and Robert goes to Torcello where he 'was alone on an island, sat on the grass, and read Yeats'. After this memorable, idyllic holiday Robert tells Jerry that he cannot bear being back in London: 'I was happy, such a rare thing, not in Venice, I don't mean that, I mean on Torcello, when I walked about Torcello in the early morning, alone, I was happy, I wanted to stay there forever' (p. 251). Like the preceding plays, *Betrayal* explores civilised people's need for some 'Other', for 'nature'. For the first time, Pinter's audiences are allowed actually to see his characters' private worlds, the past and the foreign country.

¹³¹ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1979, p. 52.

Italy itself in *Betrayal* actually has two faces, the pastoral - a place of solitude and quiet - and urban Venice. The characters escape into new worlds.

Emma is Pinter's only career woman, who has entered a male commodity world in the institution of the city - a world of books, publishing, art objects. She becomes an active participant in the male world, but her multi-layered and complex experiences and relationships with men go beyond her individual situation. Despite her access to the male world, her profession, freedom and participation in the professional metropolitan life, she becomes a victim of this masculine world.

Betrayal was seen as a crisis in Pinter's career. Critical reception on the whole was disappointed and puzzled. Almost every reviewer and scholar remarked that *Betrayal*, where the past was not only verified but also staged, represented a new departure. From Ruby Cohn, who thought that the play was 'Pinter's wholly creative betrayal of his earlier themes and devices'¹³², to Robert Cushman, in the *Observer*, who re-titled it 'Harold Pinter's Revenge':

We learn a lot about the world of the three characters, and Mr Pinter is adept as ever in slipping immensely suggestive details on to a bland canvas. These details, however, are merely sociological; we learn almost nothing about the characters as individuals and thus - since their situation is hardly original - can take no very lively interest in them.¹³³

B. A. Young, in *The Financial Times*, found the play straight-forward, 'without any complexities'¹³⁴; Milton Shulman, in the *Evening Standard*, commented that many

¹³² Ruby Cohn, 'The Economy of *Betrayal*', in *Harold Pinter: A Casebook*, ed. by Lois Gordon (London: Grand Publishing, 1990), pp. 13-31 (p. 28).

¹³³ Robert Cushman, *Observer*, 19 November 1978.

¹³⁴ B. A. Young, *The Financial Times*, 17 November 1978.

women's magazines would be prepared to print it without changing a line.¹³⁵ Even Billington thought that Pinter had betrayed his talent 'by serving up this kind of high-class soap-opera (laced with suitable cultural brand-names like Venice, Torcello, and Yeats) instead of a real play.'¹³⁶ Billington was distressed by 'the pitifully thin strip of human experience it explores and its obsession with the tiny ripples on the stagnant pond of bourgeois-affluent life.' However, Peter Hall, who directed the original production, thought that the critics 'missed the point':

I think Harold was coming out of a slightly different box. He was dealing with male-female extra-marital relationships and if you just receive the play without digging underneath it, it's a rather trite story. The obvious question is, 'Who is being betrayed?' and, with respect, most of you missed the point. You took it like a Mills and Boon story. But the sleight of hand that Harold has performed is that, while dealing with a triangular relationship, he's talking about something else. He seems to be saying that if you start with self-betrayal, it gradually infects everything like a dreadful, destructive virus.¹³⁷

Despite the play's initial unsatisfactory reception, *Betrayal* was a milestone, a 'discovery', a 'journey', which has since transformed the mould of Pinter's theatre. It has its unique architecture - a moving structure of panoramic images. Whereas the earlier plays refer to geographical places only linguistically through imagination and fantasy, each scene in *Betrayal* is set literally in realistic places. It was also revolutionary for Pinter in the sense that it ended a generation of subjective, personal and poetic memory plays, and heralded a decade of critical, penetrating political plays and film-scripts. After *Betrayal*, Pinter wrote *Other Places*, a trilogy of three short

¹³⁵ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 16 November 1978.

¹³⁶ Billington, *Guardian*, 16 November 1978.

¹³⁷ Billington, *The Life*, p. 259.

plays, before, as he said, 'getting more and more imbedded in international issues'.¹³⁸ But it was with *Betrayal* that Pinter offered a realistic picture of living and working in the institution of the city in our modern times and showed how deeply ingrained are the twin impulses of idealism and realism, escapism and frustration. *Betrayal* is Pinter's *Civilisation and Its Discontents*.

The Newcomer in the City: *Family Voices*

Pinter's 1970s 'North London' plays are peopled by artists, poets, film directors, literary agents. *No Man's Land* (1975), with its successful writers, is located beyond the city, in the North of London; while with *Betrayal* (1978), Pinter moves down to the centre of the city and explores working and living in the city. These characters compose a solid picture of London with its districts, streets and cafe-bars, and they direct the attention mostly to a male world in which masculinity is in conflict with itself. These plays are packed with images of London as the pictorial epitome of our age. These urban plays represent the modern city as a world of alienation, hostility, and random mechanised violence.

In his next two plays, *Family Voices* (1980)¹³⁹, and *Victoria Station* (1982), Pinter continues his move from the 'successful', 'rich' north London locations to the inner city, looking back at the world he first wrote about when his success as a playwright began in the 1960s. Both plays explore the agonised isolation of the individual in the no man's land of metropolitan life and they rework his earliest forms, the radio play and revue sketch. These sketches, including *A Kind of Alaska* (1982), focus on individuals

¹³⁸ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 151.

¹³⁹ The references to *Family Voices* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Methuen, 1984).

and their mental landscapes. After the earlier cacophony of competing subjectivities, there is a close-up exploration of a few alienated minds and of the extent to which people are both trapped and sustained by the worlds (and words) they think they inhabit.

For Pinter, rooms had become the topography of his characters' intimate being. The characters record and deconstruct images from the outer world through their private narrative spaces. Except for in the film of *Betrayal*, the city was never quite real but an illusion, a fantasy. With *Family Voices*, Pinter returned to radio to explore more and more of the phantasmal city, this time through voices. Radio is non-mimetic; it requires an elimination of the visual. The 'auditory mimetic space' of radio achieves the drama through visually suggestive indicators, and through a highly descriptive language.

Radio is an important part of Pinter's creative world, and colours his continuing interest in dramatic space. Pinter 'like[s] writing for sound radio, because of the freedom. [...] a mobile, flexible structure, more flexible and mobile than in any other medium.'¹⁴⁰ Radio has the freedom and the advantage to create illusory spaces via language and sound effects, unlike the two-dimensional screen of television and film.

According to Pinter, *Family Voices* is 'a very short, 45-minute play but packed with incident'.¹⁴¹ In the play, Pinter emphasises the artificial world of radio drama, which depends on an absent voice for its spatial presence. *Family Voices* consists of letters that have a purely mental existence; they have never been posted or received; or they

¹⁴⁰ Pinter, 'Writing for Myself', p. 12.

¹⁴¹ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 151.

were never even written in the first place. These letters may be the characters' hallucinations, dreams, or internal monologues. Or as Martin Esslin and Arnold P. Hinchcliffe suggest, the whole play may be taking place in the mind of the protagonist,¹⁴² who is now a newcomer in the city.

The play's style, in which three isolated characters - son, mother, father - record images, narratives, and emotions from their past and present situations in their independent letters, recalls *Silence*. The content, however, goes back to *The Homecoming*. Like Ruth, Voice 1 finds his home with a sinister surrogate family - the Witherses. Through this experience, Pinter allows us to understand the urban experience as it affects a naïve newcomer, and as a mother loses her son to the city.

Voices 1, 2, and 3 - the son, the mother, and the father - are separated from each other. Although Pinter's characters cannot communicate with each other directly because of their local separation, their monologues are all addressed in their minds to a specific partner. Most of the letters are between the son and the mother; the father writes to his son only twice. The young man (Voice 1), 'still under twenty-one', leaves his home in the country and in this 'enormous city', thinks of his mother. His letters consist of breathless, excited descriptions of metropolitan life: he has had five pints in The Fishmongers Arms; he expects to make girlfriends; he lives in an 'extremely pleasant' room. He describes his first experiences, his feelings of joy, and his doubts about a magnetic Benjaminian metropolis and its hordes of strangers:

¹⁴² See Martin Esslin, 'Harold Pinter's Work for Radio', in *Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches*, ed. by Steven H. Gale, pp. 47-63 (p. 59), and Arnold P. Hinchcliffe, 'After *No Man's Land*: A Progress Report', in the same book, pp. 153-63 (p. 160).

I like walking in this enormous city, all by myself. It's fun to know no-one at all. When I pass people in the street they don't realise that I don't know them from Adam. They know other people and even more people know them, so they naturally think that even if I don't know them I know the other people. So they look at me, they try to catch my eye, they expect me to speak. But as I do not know them I do not speak. Nor do I ever feel the slightest temptation to do so. (p. 282).

Zeifman points out that the tone of the young man's letters 'captures beautifully that uncertain mixture of bravado and fear, innocence and guile, characteristic of a young man gingerly testing the boundaries of a recently won independence.'¹⁴³ Voice 1 romanticises his concern for the unknown. But the city is more than its streets - it is the place where Pinter's people seek what they lack. Whereas old Hirst wants servants and middle-aged Jerry gets a mistress, this innocent young man still searches the city for a family. The young man's arrival in the city is reminiscent of Foster's arrival in London as a young man. Like Briggs's narrative of Bolsover Street, Voice 1 finds himself in the middle of an intricate city 'easy enough to get into', 'the only trouble' is once he is in he cannot get out; he will waste his 'bloody youth' there.

In this intricate city, he finds a boarding-house, peopled by eccentric, vivid, colourful, and blithe characters. Voice 1's letters personify and give voice to these strangers, whom he fantasises as an attractive danger. Mrs Withers, the landlady, who was in the Women's Air Force in the Second World War (she is a witty old woman: 'Don't drop a bollock, Charlie, she's fond of saying'), is his surrogate mother figure. Voice 2 - the mother - is left heartbroken on the south coast. She writes feeling anguish, worry and nostalgia: 'I gave birth to you. Where are you?' Her letters are to remind him of the

¹⁴³ Hersh Zeifman, 'Ghost Trio: Pinter's *Family Voices*', *Modern Drama*, 27.4(December 1984), pp. 486-93 (p. 486).

delights of the country, with its flowers, blooms, and cliff paths. She re-writes of his father's death, about which she wrote to him three months ago: 'Didn't you receive my letter?' (p. 284). Despite their lack of communication, their monologues echo each other - in Ewald Mengel's definition they are 'dialogic'¹⁴⁴ in character. But although the two voices share the same auditory space, there is a huge barrier separating them, and their connections are in fact false and accidental: 'I expect to meet a very nice girl. Having met her, I shall bring her home to meet my mother', the son writes; 'I often think that I would love to live happily ever after with you and your young wife', the mother writes. 'Do you miss me?', he asks; 'I miss you', she responds, but fortuitously. The son's contentment 'in this enormous city' is contrasted with the mother's anxiety and fear: 'There are so many nice boys and girls about. But please don't get mixed up with the other sort. They can land you in such terrible trouble' (p. 283). The closeness only intensifies the sense of distance.

The son's voice tries to understand the Witherses: Mrs Withers the landlady, her granddaughter Jane, an old bald man who retires early, a woman who wears red dresses, and a big man who has black hair on the backs of his hands. His feelings shift from fulfilment to disappointment as he finds this house of strangers frightening: 'At night I hear whispering from the other rooms and do not understand it. I hear steps on the stairs but do not dare go out to investigate' (p. 285).

For Mrs Withers, Voice 1 becomes her 'little pet': 'Sometimes she gives me a cuddle, as if she were my mother. But I haven't forgotten that I have a mother and that you are

¹⁴⁴ Ewald Mengel, "'Yes! In the Sea of Life Enisled': Harold Pinter's *Other Places*", in *Harold Pinter: A Casebook*, ed. by Lois Gordon (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 161-81 (p. 179).

my mother' (p. 286). He describes a memorable teatime, which is a metaphor for sexual temptation, excitement, and frustration. The woman who wears red dresses, Lady Withers, asks him into her room for a cup of tea. He sits next to Jane on a sofa:

Jane sipped her tea with her legs up on the sofa. Her stockinged toes came to rest on my thigh. [...] Jane gave me a bun. I think it was a bun. Lady Withers bit into her bun. Jane bit into her bun, her toes now resting on my lap. [...] I had never seen so many buns. [...] [Jane's] mouth, eating, was measured, serene; her toes, not eating, were agitated, highly strung, some would say hysterical. My bun turned out to be rock solid. I bit into it, it jumped out of my mouth and bounced into my lap. Jane's feet caught it. It calmed her toes down. She juggled the bun, with some expertise, along them. I recalled that, in an early exchange between us, she had told me she wanted to be an acrobat. (pp. 286-87).

This urban household is sexy, complicated, frightening and fascinating as opposed to the safe-from-all-dangers childhood country home.

The lost son writes about the 'superb' baths he has in this house. The big man, Riley, whom Voice 1 thinks is a secret policeman, comes to the bathroom when he is having a bath one day. Riley tells him that two women, who are Voice 1's mother and sister, came to ask for him, but Riley sent them back to where they came from. The homosexual overtones of *No Man's Land* - Spooner picking up men in pubs, Hirst's aggressive/subservient household (and the love of the men in *Betrayal*) - now become blatant. Riley has homosexual tendencies: 'You've got a wellknit yet slender frame, he said, I thought you only a snip, I never imagined you would be as wellknit and slender as I now see you are' (p. 289). The city is a seducer.

The mother's letters voice her increasing frustration and anger: 'If you are alive you are a monster. On his deathbed your father cursed you. [...] He died in lamentation and

oath. Was that your wish?' (p. 287). Her monologues create the impression of total loneliness and isolation. The country cannot give her joy anymore as she gives up hope for her son. She lives in pain, she becomes a recluse and a melancholic: 'I sometimes think I have always been sitting like this, alone by an indifferent fire, curtains closed, night, winter' (p. 289). Her happiness is only a distant memory now, an image out of *Old Times*:

I was washing your hair, with the most delicate shampoo, and rinsing, and then drying your hair gently with my soft towel, so that no murmur came from you, of discomfort or unease, and then looked into your eyes, and saw you look into mine, knowing that you wanted no-one else, no-one at all, knowing that you were entirely happy in my arms. (p. 290).

The boy has found refuge elsewhere. He is delighted by The Witherses. Lady Withers - who wears a necklace around her alabaster neck, 'a neck amazingly young' - plays the piano in a room where there are bottles of *vin rosé*, of a pink 'I shall never forget':

They sipped their wine from such lovely glasses, an elegance of gesture and grace I thought long dead. [...] I took a seat. I took it and sat in it. I am in it. I will never leave it. Oh mother, I have found my home, my family. Little did I ever dream I could know such happiness. (p. 290).

He has taken a seat forever in the midst of the three Withers women. His happiness, however, is threatened by Mr Withers's belief that this is 'a diseaseridden land.' Mr Withers, who 'is old and will die soon', calls Voice 1 to his room, (where there is a jug, a basin, and a bicycle): 'You know where you are? he said. You're in my room. It's not Euston Station. Get me? It's a true oasis.' He threatens the boy 'I'm there or thereabouts. Follow? Embargo on all duff terminology. With me? Embargo on all things redundant. All areas in that connection verboten. You're in a diseaseridden land, boxer. [...] Look at me', 'I was looking into a pit of molten lava, mother. One look

was enough for me' (p. 291). As opposed to the kindness of the women, Mr Withers, 'who lives in another area, best known to himself', creates verbal terrorism. He is bothersome, unpleasant, and harassing.

Riley (a name with grotesque echoes of Eliot's *Cocktail Party*), 'a highly respected policeman by trade', likes health and strength and intelligent conversation: 'That's why I took a fancy to you'. But he has to restrain his homosexual inclinations, 'because my deepest disposition is towards religion'. He straightforwardly says: 'My lust is unimaginably violent but it goes against my best interests, which are to keep on the right side of God. I'm a big man, as you see, I could crush a slip of a lad such as you to death, I mean the death that is love, the death I understand love to be' (p. 292). Like Mr Withers, he terrifies Voice 1, who is 'bewildered, anxious, confused, uncertain and afraid' about the complex relationships at the Witherses', and yet he is adjusting to its realities. He is 'content'; in London his 'life possesses shape' (p. 293).

Radio is a babble of sounds; countless isolated voices vibrating into infinity. The imaginary letters find voice in the same sound-scape, but they do not interact. As Alan Jenkins writes, 'There's no suggestion of contact made, response secured, but only an overwhelming sense of solitary, echoless speaking.'¹⁴⁵ Voice 3, the father, writes to his son from his glassy grave, 'A quick word for old time's sake. Just to keep in touch. An old hullo out of the dark. A last kiss from Dad'. But his letter, like the mother's, is dominated by laments, and curses: 'It is you who have prayed for my death, from time immemorial. I have heard your prayers.' He is in a place of torment: 'While there is, generally, absolute silence everywhere, [...] I still hear, occasionally, a dog barking.

¹⁴⁵ Alan Jenkins, 'No Man's Homecoming', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 March 1981, p. 336.

Oh, it frightens me' (p. 294). The father's grave is another wasteland - the ultimate metaphor for human isolation and suffering.

The mother becomes cruel towards the end as she convinces herself that she has lost her child to the man's world. She has informed the police of her son's loss: 'They will not rest, they assure me, until you are found'. She believes he is in the hands of underworld figures, that the city has made him a male prostitute; but to be suffering in the city is to be guilty: 'You will be found, my boy, and no mercy will be shown to you'. The mother perceives the city as a monster destroying her son. She places her pastoral countryside in opposition to the city - a place of corruption.

At the end the son imagines himself leaving his new, brutal, masculine world to return home: 'I'm coming back to you mother, to hold you in my arms. I am coming home' (p. 295). But his desire to return to the pastoral, to the nurturing maternal countryside, is challenged by the mother's rejection - 'I've given you up as a very bad job' - as she asks if the word 'love' means anything to him. Apparently, the son will never be able to make the journey; spiritually, he can neither leave home nor return to it; he is 'suffering a permanent displacement.'¹⁴⁶ It is a play about the universal loss, about becoming 'family exiles'.¹⁴⁷ The common underlying themes of Pinter's plays have been the isolation and loneliness of man in modern mass society. Through the metastatic medium of radio, *Family Voices* presents the catastrophe of loneliness and isolation most strikingly. The play delivers a sense of agony - as in *Betrayal* - through what the

¹⁴⁶ Katherine H. Burkman, 'Displacement in Time and Space: Harold Pinter's *Other Places*', in *Harold Pinter: A Casebook*, ed. by Lois Gordon, pp. 109-18 (p. 112).

¹⁴⁷ Zeifman, p. 492.

audience knows but the characters do not. Their craving for each other 'will never be said', and 'love' is a word some of them will never know how to use.

Losing 'the Knowledge': A Cruise about *Victoria Station*

Victoria Station is often dismissed as a minor work.¹⁴⁸ But, in fact, this is the one play where Pinter explores the anonymous city as his natural, primary, primitive subject matter - where his characters physically confront the city itself. The play's language accords well with its tragicomic subject. Like *Landscape*, *Silence* and *Family Voices*, *Victoria Station* has isolated individuals. But now both the Controller and the Driver are imprisoned in their urban locations. There is little visual or physical action. The characters deliver their speeches through radio messages, and fail (cf. the figure of the taxi-driver: Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*; Jack Rosenthal's *The Knowledge* - a hugely popular ITV play - i.e. knowledge of all London streets, which cabbies must have before getting a licence). The play is about a cab driver, who should be the master of the city; but he is completely lost.

A radio-car controller is trying to get hold of car 274 to go to Victoria Station to pick up a passenger coming from Boulogne. The Controller reaches 274's radio; however, this is the result:

CONTROLLER Go to Victoria Station.

DRIVER I don't know it.

CONTROLLER You don't know it?

DRIVER No. What is it? (p. 201).

¹⁴⁸ The references to *Victoria Station* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

The Driver, who does not know ‘what he has been doing all those years’, articulates a sense of absolute loss, draws a picture of human isolation, and produces a new city from his own imagination. He is disorientated by the metropolis. His present location is challenged by the fantasy space that he seems to inhabit, where everything is alien and Victoria Station is not even a ‘where’ but a ‘what’.

The play delivers tragicomedy out of the simplest conversation and continues the previous plays’ preoccupation, where Pinter’s men fluctuate between elaborate language and simple brutality:

CONTROLLER What are you doing?

DRIVER I’m not doing anything.

CONTROLLER How’s your motor? Is your motor working?

DRIVER Oh yes.

CONTROLLER Your ignition’s not on the blink?

DRIVER No.

CONTROLLER So you’re sitting in a capable car?

DRIVER I’m sitting in it, yes.

CONTROLLER Are you in the driving seat?

Pause

Do you understand what I mean?

Pause

Do you have a driving wheel in front of you?

Pause

Because I haven’t, 274. I’m just talking into this machine, trying to make some sense out of our lives. That’s my function. God gave me this job. He asked me to do this job, personally. I’m your local monk, 274. I’m a monk. You follow? I lead a restricted life. I haven’t got a choke and a gear lever in front of me. I haven’t got a cooling system and four wheels. I’m not

sitting here with wing mirrors and a jack in the boot. And if I did have a jack in the boot I'd stick it right up your arse. (pp. 197-98).

The Controller's job is to keep the drivers in control. 274's hopeless responses make the Controller decide to 'report to the office in the morning'. This is a hierarchical organisation, and despite the farcical premise, it points towards the more dangerous hierarchies that Pinter would explore in detail in the plays to come. Running a taxi company becomes a metaphor for running an institution or a state. Both are based on obedience to authority; and, indeed, there is no great difference between the secret policeman Nicolas in *One for the Road* and the Controller of *Victoria Station*: they both think their job is God-given; they sermonise like the 'local monk'; they both lead a 'restricted life'. They use language to terrorise; and when the people they control do not submit, they use their authority to discipline and to punish.

The play also works as an Orwellian metaphor for the social inter-dependence between authority figures and those under their control. The Driver needs to be under the Controller's orders to exist, to earn his living. As the Controller gives up 274, and starts to look for 135, 274 panics and begs him not to leave him: 'Don't have anything to do with 135. He's not your man. He'll lead you into blind alleys by the dozen. They all will. Don't leave me. I'm your man. I'm the only one you can trust' (p. 203). The Controller threatens the Driver and uses his authority for his own sadistic satisfaction.

Well, it'll be nice to meet you in the morning. I'm really looking forward to it. I'll be sitting here with my cat o'nine tails, son. And you know what I'm going to do with it? I'm going to tie you up bollock naked to a butcher's table and I'm going to flog you to death all the way to Crystal Palace. (p. 203).

The Driver copies his controller for his existence in the system. But these words trigger the Driver's escape into an alternative reality; he fantasises a virtual image of the Crystal Palace, which was in fact 'burnt down years ago': 'I'm sitting by a little dark park underneath Crystal Palace. I can see the Palace. It's silhouetted against the sky. It's a wonderful edifice, isn't it?' (p. 203). Then he describes a passenger, who does not want to go anywhere. The Controller explodes at this:

Drop your passenger. Drop your passenger at his chosen destination and proceed to Victoria Station. Otherwise I'll destroy you bone by bone. I'll suck you in and blow you out in little bubbles. I'll chew your stomach out with my own teeth. I'll eat all the hair off your body. You'll end up looking like a pipe cleaner. Get me? (p. 207).

Pinter draws attention to the Controller's growing misery as he says, 'I think I'm going to die. I'm alone in this miserable freezing fucking office and nobody loves me' (p. 207). The Controller, too, is trapped in this city of despair, full of 'bloodsuckers', who lead you 'into blind alleys'. He dreams of 'having a holiday in sunny Barbados' and wants the Driver to go with him ('Just the two of us. I'll take you snorkelling. We can swim together in the blue Caribbean' (p. 208)), then changes his mind and invites the Driver to his office for tea and a chat. But the Driver cannot move; his passenger on board, with whom he has fallen in love, is asleep on the back seat: 'I'm going to stay in this car with her for the rest of my life. I'm going to marry her in this car. We'll die together in this car.' The Controller says he wants to be the first to congratulate him: 'I'm going to shut this little office and I'm going to jump into my old car and I'm going to pop down to see you, to shake you by the hand' (p. 210), and the man coming from Boulogne 'can go and fuck himself'. He gives up Victoria Station with its specificity of time and place to search for the Driver in 'some far more mythical location'.¹⁴⁹ The

¹⁴⁹ Burkman, 'Displacement', p. 110.

play finishes on the immobility of the characters. The Controller wants the Driver to stay exactly where he is. Like the characters in *Family Voices*, both the Controller and the Driver suffer from displacement in a city of mazes. The Controller, too, will never be able to make his journey. The play ends with an unfulfillable promise, and the urban void between two spaces will never be bridged.

Though *Victoria Station* seems to be a reversion to Pinter's revue sketches, it is not a simple revue sketch, but a serious short play. It is a snapshot of the isolation, anonymity and loneliness of man in the modern metropolis. The Driver's exact location within London remains forever uncertain. London is portrayed as an incomprehensible magnitude of scale. Ewald Mengel has argued that 'Pinter shows that it is not the position of the individual within the social system, but rather the system as such which is to be held responsible for the alienation of people from each other and from themselves.'¹⁵⁰ Gradually through the 1970s, Pinter became interested in exploring the no man's land between the conscious and the unconscious worlds - frightening, suffocating, imaginary spaces - 'the frozen region between life and death'.¹⁵¹ With *Family Voices* and *Victoria Station*, he abandoned physical techniques and laid bare the frigid geography of his characters' minds, exploring the terror and vastness in the alienating city. The characters are locked away from each other; nevertheless, they are dependent on each other. They exemplify dispossession and urban decay in the contemporary world.

¹⁵⁰ Mengel, p. 176.

¹⁵¹ Esslin, *Pinter: The Playwright*, p. 187.

Finding One's Self in *A Kind of Alaska*

A Kind of Alaska (1982) was first presented in a triple bill, with *Family Voices* and *Victoria Station*, under the general title of *Other Places*, in 1982, at the National Theatre in London.¹⁵² The play is another visionary effort, where Pinter explores the nature of abstract mental space, in which the alienated individual finds a refuge midst the chaos of the physical reality. In contrast to its counterparts, however, *A Kind of Alaska* anticipates feminine mental space. And, as opposed to Pinter's male characters in *Family Voices* and *Victoria Station* who have lost themselves in space, here the female character, Deborah, finds herself in a kind of Alaska. Although the play presents Deborah discovering herself in a kind of arctic territory of a no man's land, she is still lost in her natural, poetic, and psychic space, as '*she slowly looks about her*' (p. 153). Her first words are 'Something is happening'; as she tries to work out the situations in which she finds herself trapped (i.e. the vacuum of her lost years, and the realities of her present life), Pinter shows that not only is man's world terrifying, but woman's world is terrifying, too.

Pinter's protagonist fell asleep when she was sixteen and awakens after twenty-nine years at the age of forty-five, caught between an adult body and an adolescent mind. Pinter's play is not a case history, but a drama of a female consciousness, set against the Doctor's 'fluids', 'injections' and facts. Deborah wakes up in a male physical space, run by a doctor, who has none of the humanism evident in Oliver Sacks's book.¹⁵³ As soon as Deborah wakes up, Doctor Hornby insistently asks her if she knows who he is,

¹⁵² The references to *A Kind of Alaska* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

¹⁵³ The source of Pinter's *A Kind of Alaska* is *Awakenings*, a documentary case history, written by Oliver Sacks in 1973. Sacks, in his book, recounts his experiences, as a doctor, with a new drug, L-DOPA - a miracle, a fluid which awakened patients, after many decades, who had been suffering from sleeping sickness. This was fifty years after an epidemic of sleeping sickness in 1916 and 1917.

to which she answers 'You are no-one' (p. 154). Hornby reminds her several times that she has been 'asleep', but she does not want to agree with him: 'I sleep like other people. No more no less' (p. 157). She challenges him:

Why shouldn't I have a long sleep for a change? I need it. My body demands it. It's quite natural. I may have overslept but I didn't do it deliberately. If I had any choice in the matter I'd much prefer to be up and about. I love the morning. Why do you blame me? I was simply obeying the law of the body. (p. 163).

Pinter's play dramatises the awakening of Deborah after her first injection, and pictures the images of people and places that she is left with. She slowly materialises and finds, herself, that she has been living in a kind of Alaska. The first vision she remembers is a place 'miles away', where 'the rain is falling'. All three parts of *Other Places* are an exploration of the territory Pinter knew. The places that Deborah thinks she is trapped and held by are reminiscent of the worlds that his previous characters inhabit in *Landscape*, *Silence*, and *No Man's Land*.

Why is everything so quiet? So still? I'm in a sandbag. The sea. Is that what I hear? [...] This is a hotel. A hotel near the sea. Hastings? Torquay? [...] Yes. This is a white tent. When I open the flap I'll step into the Sahara Desert. (pp. 162-63).

Deborah remembers the past as another country; she reconstructs the past, and faces up to the reality of the present. She presents memories through which she herself, Hornby, her sister Pauline, and the audience, recapture her lost world. She asks for her boyfriend, father, mother and sisters. At present, she thinks that she has 'obviously committed a criminal offence and am now in prison. I'm quite prepared to face up to the facts' (p. 166). She has been away, in a kind of Alaska - similar to the frozen no-

man's-land that 'remains forever icy and silent'.¹⁵⁴ But she does not want to talk about it, 'Nothing has happened to me. I've been nowhere', she tells Hornby (p. 166). She gradually describes 'narrow spaces' where she has been 'dancing' and 'Kept stubbing my toes and bumping my head. Like Alice' (p. 173). At times she romanticises the 'lightness' of that place where she thinks she has been to - and at times she complains about its 'toughness':

The most crushing spaces. The most punishing spaces. That was tough going. Very difficult. Like dancing with someone dancing on your foot all the time, I mean *all* the time, on the same spot, just slam, slam, a big foot on your foot, not the most ideal kind of dancing, not by a long chalk. But sometimes the space opened and became light, sometimes it opened and I was so light, and when you feel so light you can dance till dawn and I danced till dawn night after night, night after night...for a time...I think...until... (p. 175).

She appears not to take too long to adapt to the world that she has left for twenty-nine years, and asks about the news:

DEBORAH [...] I suppose the war is still over?

HORNBY It's over, yes.

DEBORAH Oh good. They haven't started another one?

HORNBY No

DEBORAH Oh good. (p. 174).

Deborah's sister (Hornby's wife) Pauline's arrival at the room once more makes Deborah realise the unbearable reality of the world around her. Pauline tells her both lies and the truth. She tells Deborah that the family are 'on a world cruise'. Deborah cannot believe the physical change that Pauline has gone through: 'You've aged...substantially. What happened to you?' (p. 178). Deborah takes her to be 'an aunt I never met. One of those distant cousins', as Pauline recalls the day Deborah

¹⁵⁴ *No Man's Land*, p. 153.

‘stopped’, frozen (‘like marble’) on ‘the spot’, with a vase in her hand, when the family were having dinner. But Deborah still lives in her own private, ‘natural’ world: a world quite remote from reality, ‘I’m going to run into the sea and fall into the waves. I’m going to rummage about in all the water’ (p. 183). Hornby insistently imposes the reality of her situation on her:

I have been your doctor for many years. This is your sister. Your father is blind. Estelle looks after him. She never married. Your mother is dead.

Pause.

It was I who took the vase from your hands. I lifted you onto this bed, like a corpse. Some wanted to bury you. I forbade it. I have nourished you, watched over you, for all this time.

Pause.

I injected you and woke you up. You will ask why I did not inject you twenty-nine years ago. I’ll tell you. I did not possess the appropriate fluid.

Pause.

You see, you have been nowhere, absent, indifferent. It is we who have suffered. (p. 184).

Hornby’s male space is actually complicated and undermined by the personal; he is not the objective doctor/interrogator he pretends. He is caught up in an odd web of marital politics and the one-man-two-women triangle of *Old Times*. He tells Deborah:

I have never let you go.

Silence.

I have lived with you.

Pause.

Your sister Pauline was twelve when you were left for dead. When she was twenty I married her. She is a widow. I have lived with you. (p. 185).

Pinter contrasts the inner, subjective reality of Deborah's remembered world with the outer, objective reality of Doctor Hornby, and her sister Pauline. Hornby acknowledges her:

Your mind has not been damaged. It was merely suspended, it took up a temporary habitation...in a kind of Alaska. But it was not entirely static, was it? You ventured into quite remote...utterly foreign...territories. And I charted your itinerary. Or did my best to do so. I have never let you go. (p. 184).

All this is too much for Deborah; she ignores the doctor's facts, and fantasises about her birthday party, and the 'thrill of opening presents'. At this cheerful moment, Deborah '*begins to flick her cheek, as if brushing something from it*': 'Yes, I think they're closing in. They're closing in. They're closing the walls in. Yes.' Her body metamorphoses, and '*becomes hunchbacked*' as she is trapped by her own mental space:

Let me out. Stop it. Let me out. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Shutting the walls on me. Shutting them down on me. So tight, so tight. Something panting, something panting. Can't see. Oh, the light is going. The light is going. They're shutting up shop. They're closing my face. Chains and padlocks. Bolting me up. Stinking. The smell. Oh my goodness, oh dear, I'm so young. It's a vice. I'm in a vice. It's at the back of my neck. Ah. Eyes stuck. Only see the shadow of the tip of my nose. Shadow of the tip of my nose. Eyes stuck. (p. 188).

At the end of this speech her body 'straightens', and she 'speaks calmly':

I will tell you what it is. It's a vast series of halls. With enormous interior windows masquerading as walls. The windows are mirrors, you see. And so glass reflects glass. For ever and ever.

Pause.

You can't imagine how still it is. So silent I hear my eyes move. (p. 189).

The play, for the first time, takes the audience deeply, through language and memory, into a female space that is both alien and universal.

Like Voice 1 in *Family Voices* and the Driver in *Victoria Station*, or rather, like Pinter's very first *female* characters (Virginia in *The Dwarfs*, Rose in *The Room*), Deborah is yet another woman to appear as a representative of a suffering, impotent humanity, which is graphically expressed through the metamorphosis of her body.

Deborah describes narrow corridors, the 'stinking', dark rooms, the 'vast series of halls', 'the most crushing' and 'the most punishing' spaces, which Pinter sees as both universal space – the mind/the unconscious – and somehow exclusively feminine, poetic, subjective, destabilised. It takes a shock to the system for anyone to have direct access to that non-temporal space and be able to articulate it. Indeed, *A Kind of Alaska* is Pinter's chance to explore memory directly. It is a concise, economical and, therefore, practical form. Exploring memory has been Pinter's main issue since his adaptation of *The Proust Screenplay* (1972). Pinter had not been able to get that film made but it did not leave him. He published it as a text, he did a radio adaptation and there will be a National Theatre stage adaptation soon (autumn 2000). While *The Proust Screenplay* requires the 'male' cinema – camera's eye, director, producers, financiers – *A Kind of Alaska* depends on the female performer. This is the only Pinter play that relies on the performer's ability to delve and bring emotion to bear on the text, to be a creative collaborator with the dramatist.

D. Keith Peacock argues that the play, 'from the simple image of someone waking up, effectively reaches beyond its documentary source to encompass universal concerns.'¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre* (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 123.

Indeed, Deborah is portrayed in her tragic conflict between a frozen adolescent's consciousness and a mature woman's physical reality. In 1982, when Pinter sent him the manuscript of the play, Sacks acknowledged that the dramatist 'had somehow perceived more than I had written, had penetrated, divined, inexplicably, into the heart of the matter, the inmost truth.'¹⁵⁶ He felt that 'Pinter had given me as much as I gave him: I had given him a reality - and he had given me one back.'¹⁵⁷ The emotional impact of the play is high. After the play's first presentation in October 1982, Billington stressed:

A Kind of Alaska (which strikes me on instant acquaintance as a masterpiece) moves one in a way no work of his has ever done before. [...] Never before have I known a Pinter play to leave one so emotionally wrung through.¹⁵⁸

The final dramatic situation implies Deborah's denial of the male vision. Although she appears to agree with Hornby's facts, she has no way of accepting them:

You say I've been asleep. You say now I am awake. You say I have not awoken from the dead. You say I was not dreaming then and am not dreaming now. You say I have always been alive and am alive now. You say I am a woman. (p. 190).

However, she is more sympathetic to Pauline's facts:

She is a widow. She doesn't go to her ballet classes anymore. Mummy and Daddy and Estelle are on a world cruise. They've stopped off in Bangkok. It'll be my birthday soon. I think I have the matter in proportion.

Pause.

Thank you. (p. 190).

A woman cannot live in the male space and retain that vision. Deborah's linguistic acts produce her own satisfaction at her present place, as she tries to encounter the outside

¹⁵⁶ Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* (London: Pan Books, rev. ed., 1991), p. 370.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

¹⁵⁸ Billington, 'Pinter's Sleeping Beauty', *Guardian*, 15 October 1982, p. 10.

reality and locate her own reality within the truths of the larger world that she has forgotten to inhabit. The image of isolation from the moving, living world has been a recurrent theme from Pinter's memory plays onwards. He has often presented people imagining themselves in private, empty spaces, surrounded by darkness and stillness. Some lyrical and poetic speeches in *Landscape*, *Silence*, *No Man's Land*, *Party Time*, and, indeed, *Moonlight* and *Ashes to Ashes* give pictorial views of this disturbing void, state - a no man's land, an alien territory between life and death.

The previous plays, in this chapter, presented a theatre of the *flâneur*, where the city becomes a stage, a spectacle. The characters not only map the geographical space, but they, themselves, embody the psychic and the cultural space. In these plays, Pinter draws rich portraits of the metropolis through his old/young, male/female characters' social recollections. They evoke a city in place, a city in fragments, a fantasy in memory. *Landscape* and *Silence* depict human alienation in a poetic way, exploring man's anger and resentment, and woman's freedom in an unlimited landscape. *Old Times* evokes the city of the 'gaze' - the male gaze - in a power game between man and woman. *No Man's Land* and *Betrayal* portray a city of self-estrangement. *Family Voices* describes the city as an ambiguous refuge through its young man's voice. And *Victoria Station* depicts human disorientation and alienation in the social order. And yet the Wayfarer's Tavern, Jack Straw's Castle, Bolsover Street, Victoria Station - are all clearly more than places. These places and Deborah's own private Alaska form a Beckett-like wasteland to create a metaphor for human isolation. Or rather, it is unlike Beckett, in that Pinter evokes a community of alienation, an urban world that teems with life, and therefore, paradoxically, multiplies the possibilities for alienation. Pinter's plays represent a far more horrifying world than Beckett's representation of a state of

universal alienation. The common underlying theme in Pinter's plays is the isolation and loneliness of man in modern mass society, a theme that Pinter has been charting right through from the beginning of his writing. The plays perceive London as an agent divorcing man from society. These 1970s and early 1980s London plays associate the city with a man's world - a jumble of masculine ugliness. While *Old Times* decodes male nihilism, brutality, insecurity and frustration against the poetic, imagistic, associative female landscape, *No Man's Land* stresses a defeated, vulgar, obscene male world beneath the elegant world of North London. *Betrayal* continues a similar terror through what happens to a woman in a 'civilised' man's world; and *Family Voices* describes the isolation and sufferings of a mother who loses her child to a man's world; and man is totally lost in the edgy wasteland of *Victoria Station*.

On the other hand, the lyrical elements in these plays present the pastoral as the realm of women and country - the theatre of retreat. The characters' linguistic scenery often takes them to an ordered, a happier, an ideal and a desired past/oral. Beth chooses to live solitarily in her own erotic landscape; in *Silence* the unlimited pastoral sustains romance and youth; in *Old Times* and *Betrayal* the characters leave the disturbance, disorder and 'edginess' of the city and retreat into the fantasy world of 'soft' countryside; in *No Man's Land* the protagonists yearn for a lost bucolic, mythological past, an idealised fantasy world, and Deborah finds herself in a kind of Alaska.

Throughout, Pinter's characters create different narratives of the same event or of the same place. Men and women are revealed as having different mental landscapes and desires. They weave multiple versions of the truth; and as they fantasise these truths, Pinter is actually celebrating plurality. In their post-modern time and space, Pinter's

characters cannot stop producing meanings, emphasising the fact that the plays will never come to one final truth. Men, however, are also competitive and driven by anxiety, so their mental landscapes (from character to character and moment to moment) contain more contradictions. To some extent the city is both a male-constructed world and an image of twentieth-century civilisation; in both senses, it is anti-human and in decline. The pastoral, on the other hand, is feminine - desired but formless and mysterious and never attainable by men or women. Their linguistic acts generate the characters' own consolations in their moment, place, and movements as they try to locate the personal within the larger world.

CHAPTER THREE: FILMS

Pinter's plays *describe* the alien places of his characters' dreams, memories and fantasies. In a way, films become especially valuable as through them he can *show* global landscapes. The film medium extends Pinter's reading and decoding of space. Through this medium, he can reconcile mental space and real space - the physical and social spheres in which we all live. Pinter's plays focus on an analysis of society and social space - an environment *beyond* the room, *beyond* the stage - metaphorically, symbolically and linguistically. In this sense, the screen gives greater opportunity as it is less restricting than the stage, 'Of necessity, the stage is a confined space; the screen is a confined space, too, but the confinement is variable and shifts with the camera'.¹⁵⁹ While the theatre audience restricts itself to mental and linguistic locations, the film audience is treated to 'real' geographical places. The screen is fascinating in itself: what is mental and linguistic in plays becomes geographical and tangible in films. In Pinter's films, the audience is still looking at a mind rather than a room. Especially in *Reunion*, the audience watches the present overlaid with the past in the protagonist's mind. In this sense, the screen is important as the past catches up with the present - one interest that most fascinated Pinter in *Landscape*, *Silence*, *Old Times*, *No Man's Land*, and most importantly in his film-scripts *The Go-Between*, and *The Proust Screenplay*.

From as early as 1962 (*The Servant*), Pinter has continuously been preoccupied by the transformation of text into image; he has achieved a cinematic body of work as significant as his stage work. He has worked with leading directors of contemporary cinema - Joseph Losey (*The Servant*, *Accident*, *The Go-Between*), Jack Clayton (*The Pumpkin Eater*), Elia Kazan (*The Last Tycoon*), Karol Reisz (*The French Lieutenant's*

¹⁵⁹ Longman, p. 151.

Woman) - and he has forged a particular, low-key and intermittent partnership with the stage and film director David Jones (*Langrishe Go Down, Betrayal, The Trial*).

His cinematic work and his stage plays have similarities in terms of his modification of certain moods and themes. As he has reworked himself with the films, he has also adjusted other writers to fit in with his own pre-occupations. His 1960s adaptations of *The Servant, The Pumpkin Eater, and Accident* have similarities with his 1960s 'comedy of menace' plays (*The Caretaker, The Homecoming*), which looked at the nature of the intruder and the operations of power. Similarly, his 1970s adaptations of *The Go-Between* and *The Proust Screenplay* have substantial connections, in terms of the theory of memory, with his 1970s plays (*Old Times, Monologue, No Man's Land, Betrayal*). And, finally, such 1980-90s adaptations as *Victory, The Turtle Diary, Reunion, The Comfort of Strangers, and The Trial* correspond with the canvas of the political plays.¹⁶⁰

Many of the plays Pinter chose to direct in the eighties also had a strong political element, especially Donald Freed's American film *Circe and Bravo* (1986), a fierce indictment of the US political system. In 1987, Pinter wrote the script for Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, which proposes the idea of an authoritarian America at the end of the twentieth century; and at the time he was imagining this American nightmare, he was actively engaged in attacking American foreign policy in the real world.

¹⁶⁰ Adapting other authors' novels for the screen, Pinter has also used his own plays as raw material. However, *The Caretaker* (1964), *The Birthday Party* (1970), *The Homecoming* (1973), and *Betrayal* (1983) are all scrupulously close to the originals.

From the beginning, Pinter has found film more advantageous than stage in several respects. Film offers various possibilities for articulating reality.¹⁶¹ Referring to the filming of *The Caretaker* he said,

What I'm very pleased about myself is that in the film, as opposed to the play, we see a real house and real snow outside, dirty snow and the streets. We don't see them very often but they're there, the backs of houses and windows, attics in the distance. There is actually sky as well, a dirty one, and these characters move in the context of a real world - as I believe they do. In the play when people were confronted with just a set, a room and a door, they often assumed it was all taking place in limbo, in a vacuum, and the world outside hardly existed, or had existed at some point but was only remembered.¹⁶²

The three films in this study deal with the social problems of the time, and especially with the reality of metropolitan life. As in his plays, Pinter once more uses the city as an enormous narrative. For Benjamin, film is most important in the visualisation of the urban environment. He notes that only film commands optical approaches to the essence of the city, this is because it is able to capture the flux and movement of the urban environment, to record the spontaneous and the ephemeral. All of Pinter's film-scripts are adaptations; he converts modernist monuments (Proust, Kafka) into the new medium; he adapts to make them popular, to make them public, so that a huge audience will share his ideas.

'His' films seem to continue the desire to look 'realistically' at people's lives that is central to *Betrayal*. What is more, he can show the diegetic/linguistic atrocities

¹⁶¹ As a teenager at Hackney Downs grammar school, Pinter gave a talk on 'Realism and Post-Realism in the French Cinema', and supported the motion that 'Film is more promising as an art form than Theatre', see Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, p. 15.

¹⁶² Harold Pinter and Clive Donner interviewed by Kenneth Cavander, 'Filming *The Caretaker*' (1963), in *Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, The Homecoming: A Casebook*, ed. by Michael Scott (Macmillan: London, 1986), pp. 124-33 (p. 130).

mimetically. A lot is left to the imagination in plays, but it is all visual in films. It is about 'gaze structures', watching, and becoming a *flâneur* in a commodity world. As contemporary audiences of film and theatre, we merely watch as disinterested voyeurs, as we do in our increasingly passive society. In his film-scripts, Pinter creates scenes familiar to most of us and that are ingrained in our physical memory. Through the screen, Pinter makes the distinction between being an active participant and being a witness.

Reunion

Reunion deals with a particular historical fact: the reality of metropolitan life in the decaying world of Stuttgart in Nazi Germany - a terrifying wasteland. The scenario takes place in the protagonist's mind. His mental space shows the historical decomposition of the city; and it becomes a real, physical sphere, which is implanted in every contemporary audience's mind. The film shows the city as an extension of the protagonist's own experience as a child; at present it is an alien place of his memories, the depositor of a frozen, historic past and a nauseating present.

Reunion (1990) was given a very limited release in the UK, but for the film critic Michael Ciment '*Reunion* is Pinter at the top of his form'.¹⁶³ The German painter, Fred Uhlman's Holocaust story is about the friendship between two sixteen-year-old boys in the Stuttgart of 1932: Hans, the son of a Jewish doctor, and Konradin, the heir to an old German aristocratic family. But at the beginning of the film, Hans is introduced as the seventy-year-old Henry Strauss, a New York lawyer, who returns to Germany long after the war. Returning to Stuttgart, Hans's memories revive as he looks for his

¹⁶³ Michael Ciment, 'Expatriate', *Film Comment*, 25(1989), pp. 16-19 (p. 16).

childhood home, where his parents gassed themselves out of despair in Nazi Germany. Henry is now a displaced person, a wandering outsider in the streets of Stuttgart. His memories decode the picturesque city of his childhood, which has, due to anti-Semitism, been transformed into an appalling landscape. He remembers the day he met Konradin von Lohenberg, who was then a new boy at school. Despite Konradin's reticence, the pair soon became inseparable friends. Along with the themes of passionate friendship, innocence and faith, the film stresses the early days of Nazism, in flashbacks. Despite the presence of brownshirts in the streets, Hans's father, who fought for Germany in World War I, believes there is no danger. But as the boys become more attached to each other and discover the beauty of the Black Forest, the excitement of their friendship is damaged by the poison of anti-Semitism.

The film starts in black and white: silent, short, sharp scenes that are familiar to any contemporary audience. A line of men accompanied by German guards in the prison yard, juxtaposed to hanging butcher's hooks in the execution room, foretell the film's subject visually and economically. Pinter believes that, 'The responsibility of a screenwriter in adapting a book is to find the visual focus and condensation'.¹⁶⁴ And he is aware that 'the contemporary film audience has such an advanced vocabulary that you don't have to be ponderous'.¹⁶⁵ The camera moves in and out of several distinct spaces, introducing different times from past and present. Pinter introduces the protagonist by using silent shots as the camera moves from a schoolroom in 1932, when Hans (Henry) was sixteen, to Central Park, in 1987, when he is seventy. These introductory scenes announce Pinter's approach to the film as a journey in time through

¹⁶⁴ Ciment, 'Visually Speaking: An Interview with Harold Pinter', *Film Comment*, 25(1989), pp. 20-22 (p. 21).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

the protagonist's memories, as Henry associates himself with the city of his boyhood, and reunites with it. The seventy-year-old Henry has believed all his life that he was betrayed by his best friend, Konradin, who chose to enter the Nazi Party while Henry's parents sent him to his uncle in New York, for his safety. However, when Henry goes back to Germany after fifty-five years, he discovers a different truth, that finally his friend was not disloyal to him because Konradin was executed for his involvement 'in the plot against Hitler' (p. 99). This cathartic moment of discovery is accompanied by the very same initial images that introduced the audience to the execution room with the butcher's hooks. This is the moment when the audience sees that the introductory, short, silent shots map the final scene. The execution room - first peopled by a line of men and a tall man in SS uniform, then finally unpeopled - may visually work as a metaphor for 'what is left of the Nazi past', which, as Pinter emphasised, 'can't be erased so easily'.¹⁶⁶ Through his protagonist's memories, Pinter is unfolding and defrosting the frozen, historic past. His images are made to speak for themselves; in writing films, he sees 'things very concretely, very practically. [...] The thing has to make sense visually, otherwise it is not going to be there on the page.'¹⁶⁷ Thus Pinter's repeated image of hanging butcher's hooks works as an absolute and a concrete reminder of the idea that 'the same attitudes and denials which made 1932 possible are all too present [today]'.¹⁶⁸

The initial silent fragments of the past are cut off by the barking dogs and other sounds of Central Park. The audience switches from Henry's conscience to Henry himself,

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁶⁸ Francis Gillen and Anne Blake Cummings, "'The Dark is in My Mouth': *Reunion*, *The Comfort of Strangers* and *Party Time*", *Text and Presentation: Journal of the Comparative Drama Conference*, 13(1992), pp. 25-30 (p. 27).

‘sitting on a park bench, looking into space’ (p.55). This park scene, in which his little granddaughter Alex is frightened by the dogs when she is in his care, makes it clear that he has never stopped thinking about his past and his childhood friend, Konradin. His icy and distant past has continuously been active in his mind; he tells his daughter that he blames himself for Alex’s shock in the park because ‘It’s just that I was...my mind was...I wasn’t paying attention’ (p. 56).

Although his daughter does not see the point of his pilgrimage to Germany, Henry feels he has to ‘take care of this...thing’ (p. 57). Pinter sets out the protagonist’s objective very early in the film, making it also a quest for the audience. Pinter said, ‘The most important decision Jerry (the director) and I made - which affected the whole structure of the film - was to bring the man back to Germany. The book has no such thing.’¹⁶⁹ Henry’s return to Germany shows his magnetic attraction towards the city of his mind, he re-associates and reunites with it, and investigates his past experiences.

As in *The Go-Between*, but to completely different effect, the present and the past are intermingled. As Henry gets ready for the airport, the image of ‘*HANS swinging on horizontal bar*’ from fifty-five years ago appears as a silent flashback (p. 57). Similarly, a present-time check-in scene at Kennedy airport is followed by another past-time, silent shot, which presents his ‘*FATHER in officer’s uniform with sword and Iron Cross standing next to a Nazi*’ (p. 58). After so many years, he arrives in Stuttgart as a newcomer. In his hotel room, Henry feels the traces of the traumatic past intensely: A television programme about acting is interrupted by the screaming voice of Judge Freisler, a Nazi supporter, who, in 1944, sentenced to death the German officers

¹⁶⁹ Ciment, ‘Visually Speaking’, p. 21.

involved in the Hitler assassination attempt. The television presenter asks whether Freisler is acting the part of a cruel and sadistic judge, or if he is real. Henry switches off the television set abruptly, showing the unbearable fact that, for him, the past still haunts the daily life of Germany. This television programme stresses the present voyeurism in the German media: German people are now voyeurs, watching their own history that once participated, actively, in the most horrible atrocity. This is followed by a hotel bar scene, which causes the old man's heart to sink again; a Japanese businessman tells him about a company developing superconductors to revolutionise electronics: 'They're going to change the world. Automobiles will run on electric magnets. Pollution will be finished. It will be a beautiful new, clean world. [...] We're going to save the damn world and we're going to make a lot of damn money' (p. 60). The same bond between profit and keeping the world 'clean' is seen in Pinter's own play, *The New World Order*.

Modern Stuttgart is portrayed through Henry's eyes, as he strolls in the streets:

HENRY *walking through the arcade. He passes a shop window containing guns of all sizes.*

A tramp sits on a doorstep shouting. He looks across the arcade at a McDonald's hamburger restaurant. A group of punks eating. (p. 60).

The scene is an emblem of civilisation and its discontents: on the one hand are those, the businessmen, making a lot of money, on the other there are the homeless. Aggression, poverty and corporate capitalism are inseparable.

The film moves back to explore the boys' relationship and discover in detail the nucleus of the trauma that Henry has been carrying for fifty-five years. The director, Jerry Schatzberg, mentioned that the film expresses, 'through the friendship of two young

boys, all the anguish of a tormented period.’¹⁷⁰ Pinter’s careful approach to the book and the task of selection highlight a schizophrenia in the German soul that has caused perhaps the most divisive and agonising break in human history. Hans’s description of *Hamlet* outlines the causes of this split, effectively and metaphorically:

Hamlet is a classic example of schizophrenia, of split personality. On the one hand, he laments the deterioration of civilised values, the decline in standards, the breakdown of moral systems, the failure of the state - and on the other hand he treats people like rubbish, kills Polonius without a sign of remorse, is vicious to his mother, drives Ophelia crazy, coldly sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths. The great Sigmund Freud would describe this as a classic case of schizophrenia. (p. 66).

At this, Bollacher, one of the students, mutters ‘Sigmund Freud is a Jew’ (p. 66) - a clear affirmation of the political dangers of dualism. Pinter returns to the concept of social schizophrenia when Hans’s father describes himself as ‘proud to be a Jew - but I’m also proud to be a German!’ (p. 69).

As the son of an ambassador, Konradin has lived in several countries but thinks the beauty of Germany is unbeatable. Hans’s mother agrees - ‘We do live in a very beautiful country. You should both...see as much of it as possible’ (p. 71) - and encourages the boys to cycle into the Black Forest where they are amazed by the beauty of a castle, and agree that Germany ‘is the most beautiful country in the world’ (p. 73). But the innocent realm of childhood friendship, admiration of natural space and talk about their sexual desires, is dominated by a larger fact: a Nazi truck, pasting Nazi posters on the walls, is an index of forthcoming tyranny. The charms of the German pastoral scene are disturbed by the bustle of the city as ‘A truck drives into the square carrying SA troopers. They get out and begin to paste Nazi posters on the walls’ (p.

¹⁷⁰ Ciment, ‘Expatriate’, p. 19.

74). Hans and Konradin watch this as uninvolved spectators while their idyllic pastoral is eventually being colonised by the authoritarian metropolis: 'Gradually, from the street, sounds of martial music through a loudspeaker, shouting, marching feet' (p. 74).

In transforming the novel for the screen, Pinter de-sentimentalises the work; indeed, he said 'avoiding sentimentality'¹⁷¹ was the main issue. Consistently, the film moves from the sentimentality of 'friendship' to a shocking reality that gradually infects the nation. While Hans's father believes that Hitler is 'a temporary illness - like measles. [...] This is the land of Goethe, of Schiller, of Beethoven! They're not going to fall for that rubbish' (p. 69), the 'temporary illness' grows into a rapidly-spreading tumour; in Pinter's words: 'it is the conviction and the apparent innocence, which are so alarming'.¹⁷² Gertrude, Konradin's cousin, admires the Hitler Youth and is thrilled by the 'new spirit in Germany. You feel it everywhere. I think they have the good of Germany at heart. I really do. So does Daddy. And Mummy'. (p. 78).

Another example of this disease is seen at the opera, where Hans spots Konradin and his parents. Konradin has to avoid him, because his mother hates Jews and he does not want her to insult his friend. The boys depart as the summer holiday starts; they have promised to stay friends, and Konradin insists they must not allow 'all this - to spoil our friendship' (p. 86); but when the new school term begins, they are introduced to a new history teacher, Herr Pompetski, who talks about the history that is about to be made by the election of The National Socialist Party. He warns the children against an 'evil destructive force' that is 'undermining our morals and poisoning our national

¹⁷¹ Ciment, 'Visually Speaking', p. 21.

¹⁷² Ibid.

heritage' (p. 87). The trauma increases rapidly; while the Nazis whip up anti-Semitism, Hans is bullied by his class-mates, and this is when his father decides to send him to America. At the farewell, Konradin appears infected by the new German state in another powerful example of the 'split personality'. He tells Hans, 'But the fact is we want a new Germany and we're going to get it. [...] Listen I believe in Hitler. [...] he has true passion. I think that he can save our country. He's our only hope.' (p. 90). Feeling betrayed Hans leaves for New York.

Like *Old Times*, and *Betrayal*, *Reunion* is about the intangible reunion of old friends. Like Anna in *Old Times*, Konradin both is and is not alive, through Pinter's use of film and time. Schatzberg commented, 'Friendship is often a very strong feeling - it has an intensity that you may never find again the rest of your life.'¹⁷³ Henry and Konradin do not ever reunite; but Henry comes back to Germany to see his parents' grave, to find out about his friend, about whom he has never stopped thinking. Schatzberg thinks that Henry 'keeps his anger going but the end is a catharsis. He ultimately discovers that his friend finally was not disloyal to him, did not disappoint him. Hence the meaning of the title: *Reunion*'.¹⁷⁴ What was once a passionate friendship, like those of Kate and Anna (*Old Times*), or Robert and Jerry (*Betrayal*), Hans and Konradin's relationship is betrayed and cannot be rediscovered.

The great theme of the Jews' plight under the Nazis - to which Pinter alluded so darkly and unconventionally in *The Birthday Party*, *The Hothouse*, and *Ashes to Ashes* - is here constructed through the framework of a passionate friendship. With Pinter

¹⁷³ Ciment, 'Expatriate', p. 17.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

stylistically determined to avoid sentimentality, *Reunion* achieves its goal of portraying the destructive effect of dictatorship on human relationships. Pinter said,

What is left of the Nazi past is tangible in some respects, shadowy in others, possible in yet other respects, or simply non-existent among some of the young. But on the whole, I don't think they have really managed to overthrow the past. Because...it's probably the *strongest* imaginable in its impact on the consciousness of the people. No wonder it can't be erased so easily.¹⁷⁵

Reunion, a political remake of *The Go-Between*, recalls his classic scripts of the 1960s for director Joseph Losey in its play of time and space. The bold narrative expresses what Europe still feels, as Hans says, 'My wounds have not healed and to be reminded of Germany is to have salt rubbed into them'. Pinter used similar methods in his screenplays for *The Go-Between* and *The Proust Screenplay*, in which the protagonist travelled in the fluidity of space and time through fragmented, unchronological memories. Pinter said, 'The correlations - the interaction between the past and the present - were very demanding. Writing *Reunion* and trying to find the right punctuation and shape, I felt in my mind 30 years old again'.¹⁷⁶ 'The past is a foreign country', but as Pinter has become a consciously global writer, he has introduced global landscapes to his films - other imaginations, other realities, other worlds. Speaking of *Reunion*, he said that Stuttgart in 1932, 'is another world whether you are speaking English, German or whatever'.¹⁷⁷ Translating a disturbing notion of otherness, his 1980s films picture 'real' places (especially in *Comfort of Strangers* and *The Trial*) as metaphors for Thatcher's Britain and a new changing image of England. In *Reunion*, Pinter televises the past through the present. Pinter's adaptation works especially well because it relates to the physical memory of his own childhood. Like his protagonist, he

¹⁷⁵ Ciment, 'Visually Speaking', p. 21.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

has been fascinated by Nazi Germany. He has read 'a lot about Nazi Germany, including a biography of Heidegger', who 'was a Nazi' and 'became a Nazi apologist', and a biography of Wittgenstein.¹⁷⁸ Pinter is haunted by the themes and images he explores in *Reunion*. He said, 'When you look at the photographs of 1932, of the early days of Nazism in Germany, it is the blue eyes, the shining smiles that are so extraordinarily vivid'.¹⁷⁹ The issues Pinter displays in *Reunion* might no longer have the cultural significance and historical position they did then, but this film is about another ruin in which Pinter searches for a glimpse of the redemption of humankind.

The Comfort of Strangers: Death in Venice

Pinter's adaptations of *Reunion* and *The Comfort of Strangers* should be read in relation to what he has written against: a culture of intolerance and oppression - the barbaric side of modernity. *The Comfort of Strangers* is another script that is infected with the catastrophe and corruption of fascism. *Reunion* shows a lived experience, the tangible atrocities in a foreign city, which relate to Pinter's own physical memory. *The Comfort of Strangers*, Pinter's screen treatment of Ian McEwan's novel, too, translates a disturbing notion of 'otherness', another alien place of the characters' dreams and memories, but this time Pinter interprets the 'other' foreign city as identical with Britain in the 1980s. The film shows the horrors of the 'other' but also of being the 'same' as the other, which is more terrifying.

Between the publication of the novel (1981) and the film (1990), the United Kingdom had undergone political changes that affected, utterly, Pinter's view of contemporary politics and play-writing. The connection between various fascist structures and

¹⁷⁸ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 137.

¹⁷⁹ Ciment, 'Visually Speaking', p. 21.

impulses, and the current situation in Britain appears even more clearly in his film-scripts. In just the same way, in *Reunion*, Pinter added lines to the Nazi schoolteacher's speech to evoke the disciplinarianism of Thatcher's government ('We will have order in this country', he says, 'and I shall have order in this school,' *Reunion*, p. 88); and by using the history of 1930s' Germany, he drew attention to the threat of authoritarianism in Britain. In *Reunion*, the beauty of the Black Forest is challenged by the ugliness of anti-Semitism; space and nature are tainted by the disease of anti-Semitism. Similarly, the allure of Venice in *The Comfort of Strangers* is ruined by a figure who has become a broken product of a patriarchal, authoritarian society.

Pinter develops such images to analyse and criticise the dogmatic values in a patriarchal society; the horror of fascism is shown, through Robert's narrative mental landscape, which is dominated and colonised by the Father Figure. Pinter's seizure of Robert's narrative voice-over at the start refers to a masculine world that is in conflict with itself:

My father was a very big man. All his life he wore a black moustache. When it turned grey he used a little brush to keep it black, such as ladies use for their eyes. Mascara. *Pause*. Everyone was afraid of him. My mother, my four sisters. At the dining-table you could not speak unless spoken to first by my father. *Pause*. But he loved me. I was his favourite.

(Pinter, p. 3).

As in *One for the Road*, or indeed *The Homecoming*, the influence of fathers on sons and the connection between patriarchy and political absolutism are the central concerns of *The Comfort of Strangers*. Initially, the camera draws the attention to miscellaneous objects, the collected accessories ('dark oil paintings, carved and polished mahogany cabinets, two grandfather clocks, stuffed birds and glass domes, vases, brass and cut-

glass objects' (p. 3)) of Robert's father and grandfather, which he protects as a sacred memorial - a patriarchal tradition he has inherited. He reveals both his intense love and hatred for his tyrannical and sadistic father. He adored and feared him: 'He was God' (p. 17). In *One for the Road*, and *The Trial*, Pinter focuses on a similar theme of brutal religion that dominates and blinds the individual through fear and dogmatism. Pinter turned Ian McEwan's novel into a political allegory. The antagonist's love of the English Government makes the film a metaphor for Thatcher's Britain. Despite its foreign location, Pinter's script attacks the decreasing of freedom in Britain in the 1980s through Robert's opinions that refer to the English Government:

First and foremost society has to be protected from perverts. Everybody knows that. My philosophical position is simple - put them all up against a wall and shoot them. What society needs to do is purify itself. The English Government is going in the right direction. In Italy we could learn a lot of lessons from the English Government. (Pinter, pp. 30-31).

Ian McEwan uses an allusion to explain the core image of his novel: a quotation from Adrienne Rich lays out the strong icon of patriarchy as a source of evil in society:

how we dwelt in two worlds
the daughters and the mothers
in the kingdom of the sons

In addition to the monopoly of patriarchy, Pinter's adaptation becomes contemptuous of matriarchy, too, through Robert's admiration for the English Government – in the Thatcherite years of the 1980s. Although Pinter stays faithful to the story-line of the novel, he adds dialogue to sharpen its social and political connections. In the dinner scene in Robert's apartment, Mary questions the meaning of 'freedom' in contemporary Britain after Robert praises the English conservative government. Whereas, in the novel, the conversation takes place at Robert's bar and concentrates on

his new manager, in the film it becomes a debate about British politics and the decay of basic liberties. Pinter once more puts emphasis on his conscientious interest: he studies various portraits of torture and murder of the non-conformist in the name of 'purifying society'. He has been dealing with this burning issue in his plays, such as *Precisely*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *The New World Order*, and in his film-scripts, such as *Reunion* and *The Trial*.

Colin disagrees with Robert on his praise of the English government. To this, Robert responds threateningly:

I respect you as an Englishman, but not if you're a communist poof. You're not a poof, are you? That's the right word, no? Or is it 'fruit'? Talking about fruit - it's time for coffee.
(Pinter, p. 31).

Reminiscent of Pinter's own oppressive characters, who use a cryptic language, Robert is both hostile and apparently friendly at the same time. Pinter's own torturers insistently use the same misleading language to confine their victims. Here Robert deliberately guarantees that he has the power to employ his arbitrary language to confine his victims. He autocratically defines Colin as 'a Communist poof' or a 'fruit'. Similarly, Pinter's 1980s plays deal with the horrors of this inaccurate, contradictory and careless language of authoritarianism. Here the violence and horror are lulled into stupor by the glittering superficiality of Venice.

Venice is portrayed as an ideal, desired pastoral - an erotic landscape. A pair of young English holidaymakers, Mary and Colin (similar to Pinter's 1970s successful, middle-class characters) leave the disturbance and disorder of their lives in Britain and retreat into picturesque Venice, a fantasy world. However, their romantic holiday in Venice is

destroyed by the strange comfort offered by an older, married, tourist-seducer couple, into whose orbit they are fatally drawn. Robert invites the young couple to his house: 'My house is a thousand times more comfortable, peaceful, serene' (Pinter, p. 22). There is a parallel between Robert's house and Pinter's own 'rooms', as all both have to offer is catastrophe instead of comfort. McEwan develops the feeling of unease in Venice early on in his novel:

Colin's dreams were those that psycho-analysts recommend, of flying, he said, of crumbling teeth, of appearing naked before a seated stranger. For Mary the hard mattress, the unaccustomed heat, the barely explored city were combining to set loose in her sleep a turmoil of noisy, argumentative dreams which, she complained, numbed her waking hours; and the fine old churches, the altar-pieces, the stone bridges over canals, fell dully on her retina, as on a distant screen. (McEwan, p. 12).

Pinter's adaptation starts to translate the unease of his characters, especially when Mary, having left her children in England, has difficulties in 'trying to get through to the children'. Similarly, Colin's first appearance reflects his disappointment: he 'can't read this damn book! [...] It's unreadable', '*Pages slip from his fingers on the floor*', '*He slams the rest of the typescript on the table*' (Pinter, p. 4). Pinter shows Venice as a city that horrifically transforms the outsiders' lives. Foreign spaces embody, it seems, the fantasy of freedom. It is not only that the characters fantasise abroad, but also they use '*abroad*' as a space to name their sexual fantasies towards each other. Colin and Mary talk of their own fantasies about the sex machines that they imagine in their hotel room. However, they realise that, in Venice, the awful reality is silenced beneath the festive fantasy.

Despite the discontent, Venice is also portrayed as a space for fulfilling dreams, a tranquil place for romance and relaxation:

While Mary did her yoga on the bedroom floor, Colin would roll a marihuana joint which they would smoke on their balcony and which would enhance that delightful moment when they stepped out of the hotel lobby into the creamy evening air. (McEwan, p. 13).

McEwan describes Robert's apartment in a mood that matches the sedated state of Colin; as Harlan Kennedy put it in a review of the film, he and Mary 'are invited to Robert's appartamento - which resembles a cross between a Venetian palace and an Oriental mosque seen through an opium dream.'¹⁸⁰

Pinter, on the other hand, mostly locates the characters in public places so that they explore the fatal city. Venice, with its squares, canals, terraces and balconies, seems delightful - all sunshine, gondolas, and long beaches - but Colin and Mary gradually encounter strange moments and menacing people in the dark alleys. Robert watches Colin and Mary wherever they go with a pretending helping manner, which turns out to be menacing and fatal. Robert mysteriously follows them, takes photos of them, especially of Colin, and then disappears suddenly.

Pinter's *flâneurs* explore the artistic side of Venice. They observe the Italian art, Carpaccio paintings and the 'incredible' architecture of St Augustine. Colin and Mary may as well be Pinter's own characters as both of them are linked to literature and art. Colin is a literary agent who has to read an 'unreadable' book on holiday, and Mary is involved in a women's theatre. Pinter gives more focus to Mary's involvement in this theatre group, which once presented an all-female Hamlet. Pinter translates Venice as a distressing, threatening and confusing place through the eyes of his wandering characters, reminiscent of his 1970s lyrical plays, which, too, focused on the idea that

¹⁸⁰ Harlan Kennedy, 'The Comfort of Strangers: Preview', *Film Comment*, 26.4(1990), pp. 53-56 (p. 53).

the pastoral cannot fulfil his protagonists' dreams. Despite their maps, Colin and Mary frequently become lost. Gradually, the blind alleys of Venice lead them to the fatal menace. Venice dominates Colin and Mary. It becomes a place for transformation. In the novel, they become dependent on the hotel maid who does all the work in their room. They are lazy because of the excessive heat, and incapable of looking after one another; and they are now less tolerant of disorder in Venice:

Together they moved slowly, clumsily, effecting lugubrious compromises, attending to delicate shifts of mood, repairing breaches [...] they offended each other and would explore the twisting alleyways and sudden squares in silence, and with each step the city would recede as they locked tighter into each other's presence. (McEwan, p. 15).

Pinter, on the other hand, has more sympathy towards the protagonists. His compassionate dialogues reflect the characters' innocence. Thus, Pinter's adaptation creates a more terrifying picture at the end through what happens to these innocent, playful lovers. Here is a typical example of a Pinterian dialogue: Colin cuts himself as he shaves:

COLIN Look. I think it was a pimple.

MARY Tch. Tch. The girls won't love you any more.

COLIN I think I need to eat more salt or something.

MARY You don't need salt, you need sex.

COLIN Can I have it with salt?

MARY Why not? (Pinter, p. 6).

Venice, the city of self-estrangement, is drawn as a suffocating place, imprisoning people in its mazes (Mary says: 'It's like a prison here' (Pinter, p. 21)). In the maze, the corners lead the stroller, the *flâneur*, to disorientation and alienation. This wasteland of mazes reminds us of Briggs's description of London's Bolsover Street in

No Man's Land. Bolsover Street does not, of course, figure very highly in most people's dreams of fulfilment. Venice does; and for the young writer, Colin, its famous dim-lit alleys prove truly fatal. The image of the labyrinth is used repeatedly; Mary and Colin get lost and wander the back alleys of the city looking for a place to eat before they are 'rescued' by the stranger who is following them. Margaret Walters remarks that the characters inhabit 'a labyrinthine oriental city that seduces and destroys Western visitors.'¹⁸¹ The narrowing streets take them to the dark walls of iron-barred windows. When Colin and Mary are left in the labyrinthine streets of Venice, the camera at last takes us physically into Pinter's inner city, into 'the blinding alleys' described in *Victoria Station*: Mary walks down the interconnected streets towards '*a long, dark, narrow alley*' (Pinter, p. 12). The protagonists and the audience follow the disorientating paths, dead ends and blind alleys to trace Pinter's narrative paths to the barbarism of oppression.

In the novel, Robert abruptly 'stepped out of the dark into a pool of streetlight and stood blocking their path' (McEwan, p. 26). However, in Pinter's adaptation, the audience is well aware of Robert's presence before the actual meeting of protagonists and antagonist. While Mary and Colin stroll in the streets, take photographs, and visit art galleries, they are followed by a figure like a shadow. Before they actually meet Robert, the camera conceals Robert's appearance. Instead, the camera reveals his menacing figure by using voice-over, sounds, and objects. As Mary and Colin gaze at objects in an art gallery, there is the '*sound of a scraping shoe on stone*' and '*the camera retreats*' (Pinter, p. 5).

¹⁸¹ Margaret Walters, 'The Comfort of Strangers', *Listener*, 124(November 1990), p. 40.

In fact *The Comfort of Strangers* actually starts with Robert's voice-over - recalling his father and his traumatic childhood - and this speech is repeated several times in the course of the film. The director, Paul Schrader, emphasised this as a meeting point between McEwan and Pinter: 'Interestingly enough, in *The Homecoming*, there's a scene when the son goes whack, and punches the father, and it's never mentioned again. So McEwan and Pinter have a lot in common.'¹⁸² From the beginning of the script, Pinter focuses on key symbols that will highlight the plot: the repeated images of cut-throat razors arranged in a fan and the movement of the zoom lens emphasise the significant role of sharp blades and photography. Robert is obsessed by these objects, as his physical description indicates: '*On a chain round his neck hangs a gold imitation razor blade. He carries a camera over his shoulder*' (Pinter, p. 13). Repeating the image of a man in a white suit with a camera, Pinter prepares the audience for the catastrophic menace Robert will cause. As Mary asks a woman to take a picture of her and Colin together, there is '*The click of another camera offscreen. A man in a white suit passes*' (Pinter, p. 7). The cryptic image is imprinted beneath the couple's everyday life. Pinter puts the audience on a more privileged level than the couple: Mary and Colin are unaware of Robert's presence; his hidden presence helps the audience intuit the unfolding danger; Colin's cutting himself when he is shaving foreshadows his appalling fate. But even the audience is unprepared for the nature of Robert's plans for these he observes and photographs.

The film is about an obsession with gaze - following, misdirection, looking and photography - a mania that leads the *flâneur* to his fatal doom. Colin is the object

¹⁸² Paul Schrader, 'Making it with Harold', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 58(January 1991), p. 6.

viewed throughout the film. He is followed by the sound of the zoom lens. The art of photography is used as a base to create threat:

A VIEWFINDER

COLIN's figure framed in the viewfinder.

A zoom lens moving. (Pinter, p. 4).

Objects in the film co-operate to introduce Robert. When Mary and Colin are at the glass-blowing factory in Murano, Colin '*sees through glass the distorted figure of a man in a white suit*'; the second time he looks back through the glass, '*the figure has disappeared*' (Pinter, p. 10). Pinter utilises several permutations to mirror the sinister character by using objects to reflect his main subject, who is a deluded representative of patriarchy.

Robert is an icon of a decaying patriarchy and of fascism. Through him, Pinter shows how totalitarianism erodes difference and resistance. As the three of them walk in the streets of Venice, Mary is fascinated by the feminist movement as she sees street walls filled with posters, announcements, graffiti. Robert's opinion is predictable: 'All these - are women who cannot find a man. They want to destroy everything that is good between men and women. They are very ugly' (Pinter, p. 13). Similarly, Robert wants to know about Mary and Colin:

ROBERT...Now tell me - I am a man of immense curiosity - passionate curiosity. Are you married, you two?

COLIN No.

ROBERT But you live together? You live together in sin?

MARY No.

ROBERT Why not? In this day and age, no one would stop you. In this day and age, as you well know, there are no standards. (Pinter, p. 14).

The words Robert uses to portray his father also describe a strong sense of authoritarianism:

I felt my father staring at me, staring deep into me. He chewed, swallowed. He put his knife and fork down, he looked at me. My heart started to beat, to thump, to beat, to thump. [...] He was God. He was testing me. And so I told him. I told him all that my sisters had done. [...] After dinner my sisters and I were called to my father's study. They were beaten with a leather belt, without mercy. I watched this. (Pinter, p. 17).

Robert's stories make Mary 'sick'. Robert and his stories symbolise a sickening patriarchy, which kills resistance and limits freedom.

Robert and his wife Caroline work as a team, she drugs Mary with the drink and she poisons her with a narrative full of sadistic and masochistic relationships of her strange marriage. After the drink Mary '*stands, sways, nearly falls*' (Pinter, p. 45). Caroline takes Mary to the bedroom in which the wall is covered by dozens of photographs of Colin. Caroline says that Robert has brought more and more photographs of Colin everyday, 'We became so close, incredibly close. Colin brought us together' (Pinter, 46). Mary is shocked at Caroline's obsession with Colin:

Then Robert brought you home. It was as if God was in our dream. I knew that fantasy was passing into reality. Have you ever experienced that. It's like stepping into a mirror. (Pinter, p. 46).

Mary is paralysed by Caroline, and Colin is murdered by Robert. Caroline strokes Colin's body, Robert grasps his ankle, tips him on to the floor. He holds Colin by the throat and takes a razor from his pocket and flicks it open. From Mary's point of view the audience witnesses:

An unfocused mating dance with three figures. Sudden flash of razor blade. Blood. ROBERT and CAROLINE kissing. (Pinter, p. 48).

An equally corrupt police department gets involved in Colin's murder. In the novel it is narrated:

It had become apparent that the packed, chaotic city concealed a thriving, intricate bureaucracy, a hidden order of governmental departments with separate but overlapping functions, distinct procedures and hierarchies; unpretentious doors, in streets she passed down many times before, led not to private homes but to empty waiting-rooms with railway-station clocks, and the sound of incessant typing, and cramped offices with brown linoleum floors. She was questioned, cross-questioned, photographed; she dictated statements, initialled documents, and stared at pictures. She carried a sealed envelope from one department to another and was questioned again. (McEwan, p. 122).

Pinter transformed the scene into an interrogation scene, reminiscent of his political plays and *The Trial*. The police endlessly asks Mary, 'What did you want from these people?', 'Did your boyfriend like the woman?', 'Did you like the man?', 'Why did you come to Venice?', 'Were you looking for some fun?' (Pinter, pp. 49-50). The film finishes in an interview room where Robert is interrogated by two detectives. In his letter to Pinter (6 July 1989, New York), Paul Schrader suggested that, 'the police make a remark to either Colin or Mary or themselves that they "know about" Robert - to indicate that this is not Robert's first foray into the seduction of tourists.'¹⁸³ The detectives cannot understand, following a well-prepared murder plan, why Robert has left his razor with his own fingerprints, and he has booked tickets under his own name

¹⁸³ *The Comfort of Strangers, The Pinter Archive*, Box: 10.

and he will travel on his own passport. Robert's answer repeats the absolute delusion of his father:

My father was a very big man. All his life he wore a black moustache. When it turned grey he used a little brush to keep it black, such as ladies use for their eyes. Mascara.' (Pinter, p. 51).

As Francis Gillen puts it, 'Robert wants to be strong like his father and at the same time seeks punishment for being less a man than his father'.¹⁸⁴ Robert finds himself blinded by his Father's image. Finally he prefers the darkness. On the other hand, Pinter's draft of the script finishes in London. Mary and her children go for a walk by the docks where her son keeps skipping about. The image of 'water pouring into the lock'¹⁸⁵ mirrors floating and danger; the draft suggests a moving between the canals of Venice and the Thames in London.

The Comfort of Strangers continues Pinter's interest in the masculine city. Although Robert holds women in contempt, and glorifies the male ('Now women treat men like children, because they can't take them seriously. But men like my father and my grandfather women took very seriously. There was no uncertainty, no confusion' (Pinter, 29)), his voyeuristic control draws an ugly, brutal male world. His childhood memories are about his dominating, terrifying father; he remembers his father who 'nearly killed me' (Pinter, p. 18). While transferring the novel into a different medium, Pinter made an alteration to its focal point. His script emphasises the loosely connected political issues, and so much of the film becomes an attack on the diminishing of freedom in Britain in the 1980s. It is about the close connection between sexual and political authoritarianism. Pinter is fascinated - as in *The Birthday Party*, *The Homecoming* and *One for the Road* - by the influence of fathers on sons and the

¹⁸⁴ Francis Gillen and Anne Blake Cummings, "The Dark is in My Mouth", p. 29.

¹⁸⁵ *The Comfort of Strangers*, *The Pinter Archive*, Box: 10.

connection between patriarchy and political absolutism. While exploiting Venice's melancholy and corruption, Pinter strongly emphasises his concern for the sickness of liberty in Britain. More generally the setting also becomes a metaphor for the violent destiny of modern man and the fatal course of Western civilisation - the ruthless and predatory side of modernity.¹⁸⁶

Pinter in Prague: *The Trial*

Pinter's adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* gave Pinter perhaps the greatest opportunity to look realistically at another society and to revisit the main concerns of his 1980s plays and film-scripts that are explicitly about power and powerlessness. Pinter uses Kafka's pre-1914 Prague to voice his contempt for contemporary politics, a politicised bureaucracy, a society in which the individual is defenceless and reduced in a sullen world of dogmatic values. The film's director, David Jones, shares Pinter's vision; he does not approve of a pure period approach: 'Once I'd gone to Prague itself - Szabo, incidentally, wanted to shoot the film in Budapest - I was persuaded, since the city's own reality is so extreme'.¹⁸⁷

Pinter's *Trial* was filmed in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in March-May 1992 - a city that welcomed Pinter's own plays more than his own country. Quite a number of his plays have been produced in Prague, including *The Caretaker* (1965), *The Birthday Party* (1967, and 1987), and *The Homecoming* (1970). Critics in the West were emphasising a phenomenon of mystery in Pinter's work so they tended to relate the plays to the

¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Harlan Kennedy points out that 'Instability is the film's theme and keynote. And in Venice the metaphor for instability goes deeper even than the streets made of water. Built on centuries-old wooden piles, the city sits on strata of decaying history as if Venice were a rotten emblem for European culture itself.' *Film Comment*, 26.4(1990), p. 55.

¹⁸⁷ Billington, *The Life*, p. 350.

absurd, to Freudian psychology, to myth or to language games; in total contrast, his works were de-mystified in Prague. Their reception was closer to Pinter's expectations, in that the Czech critics did not try to label and categorise the plays as their Western counterparts did. Instead, the Czech critics wrote that they were rational, clear, and part of their daily life. The Director of the Prague Theatre Institute stated that 'Pinter's theatre, as a new voice, gave strength to the theatre of the absurd as an alternative to social realism.'¹⁸⁸ M. Urbankova told the Prague audiences that because everything in *The Birthday Party* was as logical and understandable as their normal life, they would find the ending even more startling and therefore all the more important.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, Joroslov Vostry wrote about the characters with familiarity: 'These people like Goldberg appear so good hearted that you must be afraid of them. Their cruel behaviour and jokes have but one purpose: to destroy Stanley's will and make a Marionette of him. Clearly then Pinter shows a world where executioners can live as killers, but behave in a genial and friendly way.'¹⁹⁰ When *The Homecoming* was premiered Zdenel Horinek thought it situated Pinter halfway between Beckett's absurdism and Kafka's. But Pinter, he wrote, 'is never as abstract as Beckett and the speech is closer to what is spoken daily than that of Kafka'.¹⁹¹ In Prague the plays' felicity is seen to have rested in the fact that they tapped exactly the mood of Czech people. This enthusiastic reception in Prague suggested that Pinter was articulator of the realities of the twentieth century.

¹⁸⁸ 'Pinter in Prague', *Pinter Archive*, 110 - Box no. 69: Miscellaneous, Critiques, Comments etc., p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 6.

Pinter's interest in Prague grew alongside his concern for Vaclav Havel in the 1970s and 1980s. Like Pinter himself, Havel, of course, was a playwright, a disciple of Beckett, a political dissident and a human rights' activist. When Havel was suffering under a four-year prison sentence, Pinter organised a benefit in support of his indigent family; in Pinter's words, Havel was imprisoned 'for daring to discuss individual responsibility and choice, both for the writer and the citizen.'¹⁹² When the BBC asked him to become involved with a radio production of two of Havel's works, Pinter wrote that his plays, 'rich and precise, deal with fear and conformity, the pressures, upon an artist, both subtle and crude, in a totalitarian society'.¹⁹³ But Pinter did not see Havel's persecution as a simple demonstration of the evils of state communism in Czechoslovakia: 'There are signs in this country that a not altogether dissimilar state of affairs might easily arise, if we don't watch out'.¹⁹⁴

In 1982, Beckett also became involved in the campaign to free Havel and dedicated *Catastrophe* to him. Beckett's play is about space and watching, the two main burdens of Pinter's political work. With *Catastrophe*, Beckett creates a play not through movement, but through non-movement; the silent and immobile protagonist stands effectively for the silenced individual in the society, under surveillance. To denounce Havel's situation, Beckett makes visible a theatre that can no longer be spoken or enacted. In Beckett's *Catastrophe*, even more formal and minimalist than Pinter's *The New World Order*, the muteness of the victim is taken to its logical conclusion. The piece, which is about a rehearsal in which the protagonist is reduced to an object by a director and his female assistant, uses theatricality itself as a metaphor for degradation.

¹⁹² From a hand-written letter by Pinter, *Pinter Archive*, 110 - Box no. 61.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Following the Velvet Revolution, Pinter was able to realise a long-held ambition, to adapt Kafka's *The Trial* for the screen, confronting one of the most seminal modernist works, which had so directly influenced his early plays. Pinter's *Trial* is so faithful to Kafka's novel because of a real affinity between Prague, Kafka and Pinter. His own plays are seen as a reflection of daily life in Prague, and the Czech critics find Pinter's speech even closer to what is spoken daily than that of Kafka. Thus Kafka's *Trial* and Pinter's plays originate from the same roots. Both deal with the horrors of existence in a hostile universe with a comic and ironic tone.

Pinter mentioned that 'the question of how power is used and how violence is used, how you terrorise somebody, how you subjugate somebody, has always been alive in my work'.¹⁹⁵ His adaptation of *The Trial* returns to Pinter's early preoccupation with the depiction of menace; but whereas the early plays depicted menace in the minimal spaces of the isolated household, the Kafka screenplay reworks and develops the theme until the entire community becomes infected:

I think bureaucracy figures very strongly in it, obviously. There's a very deep religious conundrum in it. A lot of people think that Kafka was writing about Communism. He actually wrote the book before the Russian revolution. His reference of course was the Austro-Hungarian empire. Prague, which we see in the film, has those great pillars, the bank, a very strong solid world indeed, with a worm of anxiety in the very middle of it. Looking back or rather, looking forward, you can see elements where a society in a very surreptitious and appalling way is grinding you into the dust.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1988, p. 73.

¹⁹⁶ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 136.

As in the preceding film-scripts, Pinter is visualising the urban environment, a masculine city. Kafka's city is an enormous narrative with its solid world; Pinter said 'what you have is an apparently solid picture in every way - the buildings, the furniture, the money, the attitudes, and so on - within which there is a worm eating away'.¹⁹⁷ He has shown the reality of metropolitan life in the decaying world of Stuttgart, and Venice. Prague is another decaying world, a terrifying wasteland under tyranny. His creative work for stage and screen does not uphold any given ideology but is altogether universal. Like the cities in *Reunion* and *The Comfort of Strangers*, Prague is infected with the catastrophe and corruption of dictatorship. However, whereas *Reunion* explores a city in the memory - the depositor of a frozen, historic past - Pinter's city in *The Trial* is an emblem of a nauseating present.

The Trial's thematic and textual richness (a satire on bureaucracy, a prophetic account of the workings of Communism, a religious parable, a study of inherited Jewish humiliation) has attracted many adapters. Jean-Louis Barrault and Andre Gide in the 1940s, Jan Grossman in the 1960s, Orson Welles in 1962, and Steven Berkoff. All these adapters tended to portray Kafka as a prophet foreseeing the horrors of the twentieth century. For Pinter, the intention was more realistic as he explained in the publicity for the film:

Kafka didn't write a prophetic book. With Kafka the nightmare takes place in the day. It's certainly not abstract or fantastic; it is very plain and proceeds in a quite logical way. Although it ceases to be logical when you try to examine it, you don't know where the natural flow of events slips into something which is totally inexplicable ... I felt it to be a very simple narrative. K is arrested and everything follows quite clearly from that. He resists the whole endeavour, the growing passion. But while he's resisting and in a sense dictating the terms -

¹⁹⁷ Billington, *The Life*, p. 349.

he's very strong and by far the most intelligent person in the story - he's nevertheless drowning in quicksand. He neither is, nor sees himself to be, a victim. He refuses to accept that role. Kafka obviously employs the whole idea of how a bureaucratic system works but he's also looking at something quite different. And that is - I have to use the term - religious identity. One of the captions I would put on *The Trial* is simply: "What kind of game is God playing?" That's what Josef K is really asking. And the only answer he gets is a pretty brutal one.¹⁹⁸

Again unlike other adapters, Pinter did not treat the book as a visionary nightmare. He put the emphasis on the ordinariness and the arbitrariness of such injustices: 'The nightmare of [Kafka's] world is precisely in its ordinariness. That is what is so frightening and strong'.¹⁹⁹ For Pinter *The Trial* was 'about something that happens on Monday, and then on Tuesday, and then on Wednesday and then right through the week'.²⁰⁰ As we have seen, the Czech theatre recognised the realism of Pinter's 'fantastic' work; his *Trial* repaid the compliment.

In Pinter's *Trial*, when Josef K., a decent, senior bank clerk, is simply placed under arrest without any interrogation, the people of the city become passively involved in his situation by watching and talking about it. Josef K.'s accusation becomes the centre of all the characters' interest. Through his window K. sees the old lady at her window across the street, holding the curtain, looking into K.'s room. The repeated image of this old woman watching K.'s room is familiar to any contemporary audience as we all are disinterested voyeurs. Prague is made into a theatre where spectators watch inactively, and the protagonist is caught in a deadlocked situation.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Gussow, *Conversations*, October 1989, p. 88.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Josef K. takes his arrest as a joke at first but then he finds himself in never-ending trials. But, ultimately, the case, which Josef K. does not take seriously, is 'closing in on him more and more'. He is 'being slowly poisoned' (*The Trial*, p. 53). K. tells the inspector that he is not very surprised at his accusation because 'the world is the world, one gets used to surprises, one doesn't take them seriously' (Pinter's *Trial*, p. 5), but he looks for ways to get out of his situation. The city is regulated by irrational laws causing the protagonist anxiety. Josef K. faces a structure of organised chaos and corruption, which runs all of the metropolitan institutions. The warders, judges, court attendants, lawyer, painter, priest - none of these is evil in any radical sense - they are owned by the Court, they are dependent on the law system for identity and being. He explains the characteristics of this institution at his first trial: 'Those who arrested me were at the very best degenerate, arrogant, ignorant and corrupt. Their every action declared this. They ate my breakfast, they even tried to steal my underwear' (p. 20). As Josef K. talks about the organisation with its 'corrupt warders, stupid inspectors, totally incompetent examining magistrates' (p. 20), a scream from the back of the court is heard as a man presses the washerwoman into a corner. Josef K. wanted to throw the man and the washerwoman out of the court after which the magistrate did not give Josef K. the chance to defend himself.

The film requires a realistic setting, from Josef K.'s lodgings to the streets and squares of the city and to the bank where he works, Pinter stresses the poverty and pollution of the city:

A street of tenements. People at windows in shirtsleeves, some holding small children. Other windows piled high with bedding. People call to each other across the street. Laughter. Fruit vendors A gramophone playing. (p. 16).

Similarly, the description of the slum district where Josef K. goes to find Titorelli the court painter, for help, shows the consequences of urban deprivation:

K stands outside a house, checking the address. There is a hole in the brickwork. A yellow steaming fluid is pouring out of this. Rats by a drain. At the bottom of the steps a small child lies howling. (p. 43).

Josef K. strongly believes that his situation will be solved by logic. It was assumed that Kafka was simply prophesying the horrors of the twentieth century. Pinter's Josef K., like Kafka's, is not visibly foredoomed but a young man who believes in logic, progress and the solubility of his problems. However, K. learns that logic and reason are inefficient weapons in the decaying world he inhabits. His encounter with the priest - the prison chaplain - is the climax of the film. He complains that everyone is prejudiced against him, and that he is totally alone in this irrational world. The Priest implies that the trial is unending: 'You don't seem to understand the essential facts. The verdict does not come all at once. The proceedings gradually merge into the verdict.' Like the peasant in the parable told by the Priest who waits all his life outside the door, seeking admission to the Law, Josef K. puts his trust in some form of external salvation. In the end, he learns that there are no answers. The peasant in the Priest's parable 'sneaks a 'peek' into the building of the Law, waits 'for days and years' (p. 213); finally, as he approaches to the end of his life, a question which he has never put to the doorkeeper before dawns on him: he asks why, if all want admittance to the Law, no one else has ever shown up at this door during all his years of waiting. The doorkeeper stoops near the now nearly deaf man's ear and bellows at him, 'No one but you could gain

admittance through this door, since this door was intended for you. I am now going to shut it' (pp. 214-15). Josef K. thinks that the door-keeper used his power to destroy the man. But the Priest reminds him that 'The scripture is unalterable'. The tale is one of fundamental horror and waste. The film finishes upon Josef K.'s murder by a mysterious duo.

Pinter presents Prague as a city that is dominated by a corrupt legal system, which owns all the urban institutions. As opposed to the representation of foreign places in his other works, Czechoslovakia is not characterised as a fantasised place. Whereas *Old Times*, *No Man's Land*, *Betrayal* and *The Comfort of Strangers* explore the British experience of an alien topography and culture, his adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* interprets Prague through the equally bewildering experiences of its own alienated citizen. In place of much imagination and sexual fantasy, *The Trial* works in more solid terms, as Josef K. is threatened and victimised by a brutal and hostile power system.

The Trial presents a fatal, intricate and confining city. Prague hems in Josef K. and the maze-like streets lead, finally, to violent death. Whether Pinter shows the European city through the outsider's eyes (*The Comfort of Strangers*), or the city dweller's (*The Trial*), he shows the same world of injustices. It is a world of irrational dogmas that one cannot question, and irrational desires that one dare not face. Around this time, Pinter said that he was horrified by the sufferings for which politicians are responsible. His political plays do not support any given ideology but are firmly internationalist. Having read *The Trial* at the age of 18, Pinter has lived with it ever since; returning to the myth of social and mental dehumanisation in the 1990s and filming it in a post-

socialist society after 'the end of history', Pinter affirmed that Kafka's city still stood as the central emblem for twentieth century experience.

The preceding two film-scripts show Venice and Stuttgart as icons of a decaying patriarchy and fascism in Europe. *The Trial* translates a similarly disturbing notion of the 'other' where a repressive society erodes difference and resistance. Whether it is the great theme of the Jews' plight under the Nazis through the sentimentality of friendship, or eroding individuality, difference, and resistance through romance in a glittering Venice, or the corrupt bureaucracy through banality in Prague, Pinter's main concern is to arrive at the shocking reality and to criticise dictatorship that aims at the 'purification' of society. Through film he finds a new language to describe various reactions against the increased globalisation of control, 'monetarism' and the 'free market' formed by Thatcher, Reagan and other supporters who proceed the Radical Right's policies. The screen shows 'other' places as a big objective reality, but the 'other' realities and desires refer to the injustices in Britain. His films present a pluralism in the political frame, a 'global' view, and address some of the most important issues as we enter the twenty-first century, and open a dialogue between these issues and the audience. His film- scripts give an overview that supports and reflects his political concern.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'OTHER PLACES': POLITICAL NO-MAN'S-LAND

During the 1970s, British Theatre was dominated by left-wing politics and class conflicts. At this time Pinter explored private perception and individual memory. In contrast to the political drama of the period, Pinter's memory plays were lyrical rather than intellectual and concerned with emotions rather than ideas. As Pinter had said earlier, 'The theatre is a large, energetic, public activity. Writing is, for me, a completely private activity, a poem or a play, no difference'.²⁰¹ However, in the late 1980s, when political theatre had virtually disappeared from the British stage,¹ Pinter turned to politics; he transformed his 'completely private activity' into 'a large, energetic, public activity'. His concern was with the international and national politics of freedom and democratic citizenship.

In the memory plays of the 1970s, Pinter objectified the culture of the metropolitan bourgeoisie through the eyes, memory, and fantasy of the subjective *flâneur*. Through their mental experiences and self-images, the characters embody mythical representations of the 'cities of the mind'. The drama is born out of an evocation of offstage locales where the characters include or exclude each other; so spatial inclusion is crucial for the characters' existence. Similarly, these lyrical plays portray the pastoral as an idealised retreat, a subjective fantasy. Pinter's film adaptations, on the other hand, portray the tangible, physical, 'global' view of the city of our times, a phenomenon destroying humanity, the centre of political power and oppression. Similarly, his political plays of the 1980s extended Pinter's poetic perceptions into an objective analysis of the urban phenomenon, portraying cities working as modulators. This is the decade when his 'metaphorical' political engagement is at its greatest. As stated earlier,

²⁰¹ Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre', p. 10.

writing has been a discovery, a journey and an exploratory act for Pinter; he wrote about the 1980s social and cultural scene as he discovered and explored the workings of police power, official secrecy, and the insidious state censorship. Through rational understanding, Pinter conducted himself as an 'investigator'. His political dramas frame the relationship between fictional and empirical reality as Pinter clarifies and reworks his earlier themes of oppression and the individual, and the subversive function of language. As opposed to the fantasy-reality of metropolitan life in the memory plays, Pinter now writes of the inhuman character of a great city poisoned by misery, contempt and oppression. And, similarly, the lyrical interiors and serene landscapes of the memory plays are taken over by a political anti-pastoral, a pastoral subjugated and colonised by the metropolis. The plays depict an evolution of the pastoral from retreat to indictment, where a brutally corrupt society is matched by its landscapes. What transformed these familiar spaces of city and country? The reasons for this metamorphosis will be traced through Pinter's own investigation and identification of contemporary issues, which link his personal dramatic art and his critical political activism.

The Development of Pinter's Political Activism

Pinter said in an interview in 1996 that 'Theatre is about relish, passion, engagement. It also leads to adventure. It's not a careful activity, it's a dangerous activity.'²⁰² In the world of public events in the 1980s, Pinter became a political activist both nationally and internationally with a clear set of public opinions defined by his active involvement with International PEN, Charter 88, Amnesty International, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Arts for Nicaragua, the 20th June Group and Index on Censorship. After

decades of apparent non-commitment and coolness towards polemical drama, and at a time when the 1968 generation of radical dramatists was losing its energy and moving towards disillusioned silence, Pinter quite unexpectedly opposed the general feeling that effective political theatre was an impossibility. Above all, he suggested that the language of political systems must be observed critically.²⁰³ His forthright political plays were not concerned with utopian visions of revolution, however, but with depicting the ways power operates.

In a speech accepting the David Cohen Literature Prize in 1995, Pinter ironically pointed out that in some quarters his plays had been 'massacred' and that he had been variously described as 'enigmatic, taciturn, terse, prickly, explosive and forbidding'. Contradicting the critics' descriptions, he outlined his writing life as one of 'relish, challenge, excitement.'²⁰⁴ The occasional literary hostility to Pinter's earlier work was, however, the merest foreshadowing of the fundamental animosity which was directed against him now in response to his growing political activism both in his life and in his art. Due to his overtly political prose and poetry, a series of political plays, and the film-scripts he wrote between *Betrayal* and *Moonlight*, Pinter was seen to have become abruptly political. Reminded of his essentially political plays, *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *The Hothouse*, all of which he wrote before 1960, Pinter defended a 'consistency' in his work: 'Obviously I've been "elsewhere" at other times...one "travels"...that's the whole point of being a writer'.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Mireia Aragay, 'Writing, Politics, and *Ashes to Ashes*: An Interview with Harold Pinter', *Pinter Review*, Tampa, 1995-96, pp. 4-15 (p. 9). Reprinted in *Various Voices*, pp. 58-70.

²⁰³ See Vera Gottlieb, 'Pinter's Landscapes - or "It Never Happened"', an interview with Harold Pinter (London, 22 January 1998), in *Theatre in a Cool Climate* (Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1999), pp. 13-26.

²⁰⁴ Harold Pinter's speech of thanks on receiving the David Cohen Literature Prize for 1995, *Introduction to Harold Pinter: Plays: Four* (Faber and Faber), pp. vii-xii.

²⁰⁵ Gottlieb, p. 18.

Rather than belonging to any established political factions of the so-called 'left', Pinter's political panorama is essentially humanitarian. A forceful opponent of oppression both at home and abroad, he has condemned the inequities and wrongs that politicians cause to the people of the world under the rhetorical vocabulary of 'democracy' and 'law'. He was especially disturbed by the fact that politicians erode citizenship through their social power and claims to moral entitlement. Irritated by people who stand on a spurious sense of dignity, Pinter denounced, 'The solemnity of the official position! Essentially to cover up murderous activities.'²⁰⁶

Pinter was most appalled by United States support for political tyranny about which he has written substantially in - along with the poetry, prose and plays - articles to the press which are sometimes subtle, sometimes impassioned. For example, Pinter's essay 'The US Elephant Must be Stopped', in which he expressed his contempt for US foreign policy, was published in the *Guardian* on 5 December 1987. It expressed his opposition to America's intrusion into global politics, specifically its intervention in Nicaragua, Chile, Greece and Cyprus.²⁰⁷ In 1993, condemning the US missile attack on

²⁰⁶ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 130.

²⁰⁷ Harold Pinter, 'The US Elephant Must Be Stopped', *Guardian*, 5 December 1987, p. 10. Reprinted in *Various Voices*, pp. 171-72. This is a strong early example of Pinter's polemical struggle and typically it draws attention to the *language* of governments. In June 1986, the International Court of Justice decided against the US: 'That the US, by training, arming, equipping, financing and supplying the Contra Force, or otherwise encouraging, supporting and aiding military activities in and against Nicaragua, had breached its obligations under international law not to intervene in the affairs of another state'. Pinter drew attention to Washington's disrespect for international law. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson said to the Greek ambassador to the US: 'America is an elephant. Cyprus is a flea. Greece is a flea. If these two fellows continue itching the elephant, they may just get whacked by the elephant's trunk, whacked good'. Pinter argued that Johnson encouraged the Colonels to take over two years later. Turning to the American intervention in the Nicaraguan revolution, Pinter insisted: 'The Nicaraguan revolution was a popular revolution which (at the cost of 50,000 dead) overthrew a dictatorship which had been supported by the US for forty years. [...] The Sandinista government inherited a country with no organised health service, very high levels of child mortality and malnutrition, widespread illiteracy; the majority of the population poverty-stricken. The strides the new Nicaragua, despite all its obvious difficulties, has made in health and literacy are unprecedented in the region. Torture, monitored by Amnesty International and confirmed by them to be widespread and systematic in the majority of Latin American states, is not practised. Nicaragua is intent on establishing a decent, sane and civilised society, if left to itself. The US is not leaving it to itself but doing its best to destroy it. [...] The US has always protected its interests in the area [Central America] quite rigorously. It has supported - and in some cases created - all military and right-wing dictatorships on the continent. Among other verified acts, the CIA brought down the legally elected democracies of Guatemala in 1951 and of Chile in 1973. [...] The US dismissed the judgement of the International Court. [...] The US has done enormous and far-reaching damage to this proud, small, vulnerable and infinitely courageous country. Thousands of Nicaraguan men, women and children have been murdered and mutilated by the Contras'. Pinter finishes the article 'We Have to Stop the American Elephant'.

Baghdad and the US-organised economic blockade of Nicaragua, he said that 'the United States is a truly monstrous force in the world.'²⁰⁸ His 1996 article, 'Picking a Fight with Uncle Sam' articulated Pinter's contempt for the habitual language used by the American presidency; a language which is 'actually employed to keep thought at bay.'²⁰⁹ More recently, following the election of New Labour, Pinter expressed a sense of 'nausea' at 'Blair's simpering support for the US Government', which he defined as 'a bovine monster out of control.'²¹⁰ Pinter repeatedly drew attention to injustices perpetrated by America's allies and client states.

With Western 'civilisations' preparing for a new century with missiles, in 1999 Pinter prepared a programme for BBC2 on the calamity in the Balkans, for which he held NATO responsible.²¹¹ He saw the situation as 'a replay of the Holocaust' and he condemned the 'application of moralistic violence'. Pinter questioned NATO's 'moral authority', a matter of 'power and bombs'. As he does in his plays, he looked for the reality beneath the rhetoric used by the US, and discovered a 'humanitarian catastrophe'. On the same issue, Pinter delivered a speech to the Confederation of Analytical Psychologists, in London on 25th June 1999: 'The NATO Action in Serbia'²¹². Seeing NATO as 'America's missile', he evaluated the NATO action as 'another blatant and brutal assertion of US power.' Pinter quoted a declaration by NATO's supreme commander General Wesley K Clark just before the bombing began: "Unless

²⁰⁸ Steve Grant, 'Pinter: My Plays, my Polemics, my Pad', *Independent*, 20 September 1993, p. 13.

²⁰⁹ Pinter, 'Picking a Fight with Uncle Sam', *Guardian*, 4 December 1996, p. 4. About this article Pinter said that while the article was his, the title was not. See Mireia Aragay, 'Writing, Politics, and *Ashes to Ashes*: An Interview with Harold Pinter', *Pinter Review*, p. 5.

²¹⁰ Valerie Grove, 'Rebel without a Pause: an interview with Harold Pinter', *The Times*, 14 February 1998, p. 20.

²¹¹ Pinter, 'Against the War', in *Counter-blast*, BBC 2, 4 May 1999. In June 1999, he joined a gathering of 6000 marchers in a park next to the Imperial War Museum in London. Pinter described the current peace talks as a sham, and claimed that the war had been totally unwarranted. He talked about a deep sense of shame that the Labour Government had taken 'a leading role in what is essentially a criminal act', Audrey Gillan, 'Bombing Shames Britain, Pinter Tells Protesters', *Guardian*, 7 June 1999, p. 4.

²¹² The printed text of 'The NATO Action in Serbia' was given by Pinter to the participants (of whom I was one) of a Cambridge Conference on 13 July 1999.

President Milosevic accepts the International Community's demands we will systematically and progressively attack, disorganise, ruin, devastate and finally destroy his forces." And Pinter sardonically commented, 'Milosevic's "forces", as we now know, included television stations, schools, hospitals, theatres, old people's homes.' Pinter assessed these civilian deaths as 'acts of murder'. He also remarked that the damage to irreplaceable treasures of Byzantine religious art was 'psychotic vandalism'. Pinter argued that the United States has exercised a 'sustained, systematic and clinical manipulation of power world-wide since the end of the last World War, while masquerading as a force for universal good.' He insisted that the United States - 'the bastion of democracy, freedom and Christian values', accepted as leader of the "free world" - is in fact 'a profoundly dangerous and aggressive force, contemptuous of international law, indifferent to the fate of millions of people who suffer from its actions, dismissive of dissent or criticism, concerned only to maintain its economic power, ready at the drop of a hat to protect that power by military means, hypocritical, brutal, ruthless and unswerving'.²¹³

Pinter has visited other countries and observed their social mutations from an investigator's point of view. Following several visits to Nicaragua, he became the chairman of the Arts for Nicaragua Fund in England, to support the country's artists. He went to Prague in 1990 and, like the 'writer as *flâneur*', he observed as the city miraculously changed. He witnessed the sense of liberation as its people freed themselves from oppression. In a 1990 television programme, he set out his ideas on

²¹³ Pinter, 'The NATO Action in Serbia'.

Washington's abuse of language in his speech, 'Oh, Superman'.²¹⁴ Because of the 'easy, vivid, all-too-easily-believed' rhetoric of the US, the people of Central America could not free themselves from oppression as the people of Eastern Europe had. Pinter blamed this situation on 'a disease at the very centre of language, [...] language becomes a permanent masquerade, a tapestry of lies'. He questioned the use/abuse of language as a tool:

Do the structures of language and the structures of reality (by which I mean what actually *happens*) move along parallel lines? Does reality essentially remain outside language, separate, obdurate, alien, not susceptible to description? Is an accurate and vital correspondence between what *is* and our perception of it impossible? Or is it that we are obliged to use language in order to obscure and distort reality - to distort what *is*, to distort what *happens* - because we fear it? We are encouraged to be cowards.²¹⁵

Thus far, Pinter might be describing the situation in *The Birthday Party*, where Petey and Meg cannot admit what they have witnessed. Then, however, Pinter moved beyond metaphor to state the issues that were beginning to dominate his theatre writing overtly:

We can't face the dead. But we must face the dead because they die in our name. We must pay attention to what is being done in our name. I believe it's because of the way we use language that we have got ourselves into this terrible trap, where words like freedom, democracy and Christian values are still used to justify barbaric and shameful policies and acts. We are under a serious and urgent obligation to subject such terms to an intense critical scrutiny. If we fail to do so, both our moral and political judgement will remain fatally impaired.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Pinter, 'Oh Superman', broadcast for *Opinion*, Channel 4, 31 May 1990, printed in *Various Voices*, pp. 175-82.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Simultaneously, Pinter both relishes and holds language at a critical distance. Spooner says in *No Man's Land*, 'All we have left is the English language.' Pinter caresses and teases it. As his essay 'Eroding the Language of Freedom' confirms, his main interest has always been the operation of language: 'Moving among words, sorting them out, watching them appear on the page', he said give him 'considerable pleasure',²¹⁷ but at the same time he has 'another strong feeling about words which amounts to nothing less than nausea':

such a weight of words confronts us day in, day out, words spoken in a context such as this, words written by me and by others, the bulk of it a stale dead terminology; ideas endlessly repeated and permuted become platitudinous, trite, meaningless. Given this nausea, it's very easy to be overcome by it and step back into paralysis.²¹⁸

In an interview entitled 'Nauseated by Language', Peter Handke said in 1970 that he was preoccupied by a feeling of 'nausea at stupid speechification and the resulting brutalisation of people'.²¹⁹ In his influential play about language and socialisation, *Kaspar*, the hero 'seems a broken man. Then he gets more and more mixed up - his language is suddenly deranged - until complete schizophrenia sets in.' The state of 'schizophrenia' caused by language in Handke is replaced by a state of 'paralysis' in Pinter, as seen in the victims of *The Birthday Party*, *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *Party Time*, and *The New World Order*. It is this paralysis that Pinter sets out to oppose.

²¹⁷ Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre', p. 13.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Peter Handke, 'Nauseated by Language', an interview with Arthur Jones, *Drama Review*, 15(1970), pp. 57-61 (p. 59). Handke has also been vehement in condemning NATO assaults on Serbia, to the point of becoming a figure of hate for many in his native Austria.

Besides his consistent denunciation of the rhetoric of Washington's 'ethical' policy, he also became concerned with politics in Britain and elsewhere, with nuclear disarmament, and especially with the world-wide plight of repressed writers. A life-long supporter of nuclear disarmament, Pinter stated in 1980, 'There is a great deal of nuclear panic about, without people recognising it or referring to it, and this dictates many attitudes.' It 'has come to dominate everything.'²²⁰ In the 1980s his political commitment grew into a greater activism.²²¹ In 1988, Pinter, with other distinguished intellectuals, founded the 20th June Group to discuss 'the plight of the country and its values'.²²² He said that he felt 'a quite palpable depression' about the way people lived in Thatcher's Britain. In response, Pinter was widely pilloried by media critics as a 'champagne socialist', 'an angry old man', 'the leader of the ill-conceived 20th June group'. Now the damaging 'rhetoric of dismissal and contempt' was directed at Pinter himself.

Politics and Drama

In Pinter's political plays, there is a link between the personal and the critical as he fuses the dramatic art, his activism and his analytic observations. Pinter's friend Vaclav Havel, who had provided a model for dissident writers and human rights activists, wrote:

One cannot invent strategy without an army: political programmes are not born at writers' desks, but only in the everyday political activity of those who carry them out, from their

²²⁰ Pinter in Miriam Gross, 'Pinter on Pinter', *Observer*, 5 October 1980, p. 27.

²²¹ One of the earliest public manifestations of this was Pinter's participation in a short film, 'Poets Against the Bomb'. The film was produced by CND Poet Film (Greater London Arts Association) in 1981. It uses footage of the event of the same name staged by Kensington and Chelsea CND at Chelsea Town Hall on 15 April 1981. The film includes performances by Pete Brown, Ivor Cutler, Gavin Ewart, Adrian Henri, as well as Harold Pinter. The film was intended for peace groups, poetry lovers and general audiences. This information can be found in Film Index International (CD-ROM).

²²² Pinter in Sue Summers, 'A Conscientious Objector', *Independent*, 18 October 1988, p. 19.

constant reflection on the interests the movement should express, and their constant confrontation with social reality, public opinion, the analysis of experts, and so on.²²³

The 'realities', 'discontents' and the consequences of everyday political life which Pinter investigated and identified through political commitment, have naturally influenced him as a playwright, a screenwriter and as a director.

The themes unifying his political activity have been a concern with authoritarianism, freedom of speech, resistance to state censorship, racial and religious intolerance, nuclear weapons and unjust imprisonment. Each of the 1980s plays articulates the disturbing relationship between fear and power. There are some shared objectives, such as Pinter's articulation of the political power of language, the miseries of city life; as well as some rather more topical interests, such as the bureaucratic conspiracy surrounding nuclear war (*Precisely*), the abuse of human rights (*One for the Road*), the oppression of minorities (*Mountain Language*), bourgeois complicity in governmental cruelty (*Party Time*). His theatre expresses the various voices through which the dangerous facts of life may be expressed.

The political plays that he wrote between 1980 and 1991 represent specific and brutal acts in which violence is shown rather than implied. Pinter transfers menace from private relationships to expressly political ones; but his preoccupation with language as an instrument of distortion has never decreased and proffers the use/abuse of language as the quintessence of oppression. He refers to the dregs of society, to the masses who do not conform to the state, to those faced with the pain of death, imprisonment, and social degradation. Some of the plays, like *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language*,

²²³ Vaclav Havel, 'On the Theme of an Opposition', in *Open Letters: Selected Prose, 1965-1990*, ed. trans. by Paul Wilson (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. 25-35 (p. 30).

target a change, like Peter Handke's Kaspar's transformation from inarticulate clown to model speaker. This also applies to the promised transformation that Stanley will undergo at Monty's: 'This was a model of conduct, building a person into society's course of conduct by language, by giving him words [...] he is reconstructed by voices, by language models'.²²⁴

The depersonalised system, the source of power, which is rigid, resistant, and strictly hierarchical, is represented by the voice of spokesmen, what Derrida calls the 'mouthpieces' in 'The Theorem and the Theatre' (*Of Grammatology*): 'Like the alphabetic signifier, like the letter, the mouthpiece himself is not inspired or animated by any particular language. He signifies nothing. He hardly lives, he lends his voice.'²²⁵

Nicolas in *One for the Road* is exactly such a voice, a 'mouthpiece' of 'the man who runs this country' (who never appears and may not even exist); the Sergeant and the Officer in *Mountain Language* claim to be repeating and enacting the dictates of some mythologised 'military decree'. In all of these plays, the longing for individual freedom is walled in by a social institution that is an over-determined and a closed system.

Pinter's movement into political drama was not easy. *Other Places*, which he wrote in 1980, was followed by a three-year period in which he did not write a play; he said he was 'getting more and more imbedded in international issues.'²²⁶ After *Other Places*, Pinter told Mel Gussow that he 'felt obliged to explore other territory':²²⁷ the world of national/international public events; and at this stage he still thought this was inimical

²²⁴ Handke, p. 60.

²²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 305.

²²⁶ Billington, *The Life*, p. 286.

²²⁷ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 149.

to dramatic experience. But, with *Precisely*, Pinter started to explore the ‘other territory’ and discover a new voice for himself and his theatre. It was performed at the Apollo Theatre, London, as part of an anti-nuclear gala in December 1983. The characteristics of this ‘other territory’ are summarised economically and strikingly in *Poem*, which Pinter wrote in 1995:

Don’t look.

The world’s about to break.

Don’t look.

The world’s about to chuck out all its light

And stuff us in the chokepit of its dark,

That black and fat and suffocated place

Where we will kill or die or dance or weep

Or scream or whine or squeak like mice

To renegotiate our starting price.²²⁸

This is a summary of the whole of Pinter’s political work from *The New World Order* to *Party Time*, and echoes the plays’ key operative verbs to describe what he had come to see as the condition of humanity in the space of the twentieth century.

Pinter has stated that ‘each of the plays dealt with the individual at the mercy of a certain authoritarian system.’²²⁹ He said ‘These plays, all of them, are to do not with ambiguities of power, but actual power.’²³⁰ In 1988, he was more precise about the various interconnected kinds of power that his plays portray:

²²⁸ Pinter, ‘Poem’, in *Various Voices*, p. 159.

²²⁹ Cited in Ronald Knowles, *Understanding Harold Pinter* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), p. 184. Originally a television interview with John Tusa, ‘Harold Pinter’s Plays and Politics’, BBC2, *Saturday Review*, 28 September 1985.

²³⁰ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 152.

State power, family power, religious power, power used to undermine, if not destroy the individual, or the questioning voice, or the voice which simply went away from the mainstream and refused to become part of an easily recognisable set of standards and social values.²³¹

Redefining Pinter as a 'Foucauldean *avant le lettre*', Terry Eagleton drew attention to Pinter's consistent fascination with the subtle interchanges of power.²³² Eagleton argued that like Foucault, Pinter had shifted the meaning of the political, away from the state and social rebellion, to the micro-political intensities of everyday life, which was the reason for the apparently non-political quality of Pinter's earlier work. Certainly, in such plays as *The Birthday Party*, *The Hothouse* and *The Dumb Waiter*, all written between 1957-60, Pinter dramatised the abuse of authority. But the earlier plays rely on metaphor; whereas, in *One for the Road*, for example, the deed is much more specific and direct. Pinter said to Carey Perloff at New York rehearsals of *The Birthday Party* and *Mountain Language* that, earlier on, 'The theme of gratuitous torture is subliminal and unspoken, hidden beneath black comedy'.²³³ Later the torture became more explicit. *The Birthday Party* leaked menace from beneath 'a mask of smiling civility',²³⁴ but Pinter said during these rehearsals that he could not see the joke anymore; he couldn't write about torture and make it funny.²³⁵

There were, of course, a number of critics who thought that Pinter's work had become suddenly political. As opposed to the wave of playwrights, who started their careers writing about political issues in the 1950s, and then retreating into privacy, Pinter, they argued, started writing political drama in his late maturity. Wardle called Pinter's career

²³¹ Anna Ford, 'Radical Departures: an interview with Harold Pinter', *Listener*, 120(1988), p. 6.

²³² Terry Eagleton, 'Out of the Closet', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 15 November 1991, p. 20.

²³³ Carey Perloff, 'Pinter in Rehearsal: From *The Birthday Party* to *Mountain Language*', in *Pinter at Sixty*, ed. by Katherine H. Burkman and Kundert Gibbs (Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 3-17 (p. 6).

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

‘the history of modern English drama in reverse’.²³⁶ However, Pinter insisted, in 1993, that his ‘early work was nothing to do with existentialism’, and that it was ‘political’.²³⁷ Carey Perloff, who directed *Mountain Language* and *The Birthday Party* in a double bill (New York, Fall 1989), argued that *Mountain Language* was a ‘distillation’ of *The Birthday Party*,²³⁸ and in 1993, Esslin argued that the common factor in Pinter’s early, seemingly unpolitical and later, openly propagandist, works was ‘the image of the torturer, the terrorist’.²³⁹ Discussing the 1995 revival of *Hothouse*, Pinter’s official biographer Billington suggested that ‘we need to revise our notion of Pinter’: he was, from the start, a dramatist with sharp antennae for the insidious corruption of power.²⁴⁰ Indeed, Pinter’s new persona, in life and art, caused other critics to re-read his earlier work: Graham Woodroffe reconsidered *The Caretaker* in 1988 in his essay ‘Taking Care of the Coloureds: The Political Metaphor of Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker*’²⁴¹; John L. Kundert Gibbs explored the political elements in *Victoria Station*, seeing it as a ‘rewriting’ of Kafka’s *The Trial*²⁴²; and Mark Silverstein wrote a book-length study, *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power* (1993), ‘rethinking the role of language’ in *The Birthday Party*, *The Collection*, *The Homecoming*, *Old Times*, and grasping the issues of power, identity and sexuality in terms of the political resonance of the power struggles in these plays.

²³⁶ Irving Wardle, ‘The Master and the Muse’, *Independent on Sunday*, 20 October 1991, pp. 18-19 (p. 18).

²³⁷ Grant, p. 13.

²³⁸ Perloff, p. 5.

²³⁹ Esslin, ‘Harold Pinter’s Theatre of Cruelty’, in *Pinter at Sixty*, pp. 27-36 (p. 28).

²⁴⁰ Billington, *Country Life*, 189(1995), p. 83.

²⁴¹ Graham Woodroffe, ‘Taking Care of the Coloureds: The Political Metaphor of Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker*’, *Theatre Journal*, 40.4(December 1988), pp. 498-508 (Woodroffe argues that the play is the product of an individual psychology as well as of a social reality, which is the arrival of people from Commonwealth Countries into the UK. He draws attention to Britain’s policy on immigrants and the 1962 Act, which restricted entry after 1962).

²⁴² John L. Kundert-Gibbs, ‘“I am powerful...and I am only the lowest doorkeeper”: Power Play in Kafka’s *The Trial* and Pinter’s *Victoria Station*’, in *Pinter at Sixty*, pp. 149-60.

Instead of the private landscapes of memory, the political plays employ a linguistic geography that refers to a universal social repression in the contemporary world. *One for the Road* takes place in the urban world; and *Party Time* is set in a fashionable bourgeois house in a metropolis; *Mountain Language*, as its title suggests, takes place in the country. But the plays represent the colonisation of the country by the city; and now, the city is controlled by a brutal elite. They also present the multiple ways in which women are abused by men. Teddy and Ruth; Duff and Beth; Deeley and Kate; Robert, Jerry and Emma: the male was master in none of Pinter's earlier texts; they were dominated by the emotional complexities of territorial conflict between men and women. His political dramas concentrate on a struggle between the individual and the political (super)structure. As a result, these plays involve a radical change in the nature of space: once impregnable spaces become brutally conquered. The central themes of the subtlety of memory and sexuality are destroyed in the political plays, where masculinity proclaims the triumph of the will. The brutes have escaped from the Room.

According to Gunther Klotz, political theatre tries 'to produce plays that arouse a wider and deeper awareness of the necessity and of the possibility to change the present society.'²⁴³ In this sense, Pinter's plays are hardly 'political', as he is very careful not to sermonise. However, one must not forget that drama, by dealing with human conflicts and tensions, is 'political' by its very nature. *The Birthday Party* is political, because it shows the process by which an innocent mind is neutralised and re-sculptured to perceive the world in the terms authorised by a diseased society.

²⁴³ Gunther Klotz, 'Internationalism and Present British Drama', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 27(1979), pp. 35-42.

Carol Rosen's arguments, in *Plays of Impasse: Contemporary Drama Set in Confining Institutions*, are helpful in approaching Pinter's political plays. Rosen presents three distinct, stylistic emphases in approaching what she calls 'impasse':

- 1 - Plays that strive for objectivity, moving forward linearly, but subordinating plot to a depiction of a total institution with naturalistic, almost documentary accuracy as a kinetic *objet trouvé*; (primarily photographic, exterior in its bias);
- 2 - Satiric, parodic treatments of total institutions, using these settings as entertaining and often grimly funny vehicles for social commentary and for a play of ideas (expresses a satirical point of view, a commentary on the Structure as a metaphor for society gone haywire); and
- 3 - Imagistic, reductive, interior plays that suggest the total institution as they focus on the individual lost in a world he did not make and cannot control (tending towards lyricism, indicating by means of props, sounds, and spaces an inner isolation, a personal stalemate within the larger, implied Structure).²⁴⁴

Many contemporary British dramatists (for example David Hare, Trevor Griffiths, Howard Brenton and Howard Barker) have, one way or another, been concerned with staging discontent - national or global, explicitly or implicitly. Brenton, for example, emphasises that theatre is the place for 'savage insights'. In Pinter's political plays, the spectator finds, not a metaphor, but the inhumanity of the contemporary world; the scientific tone of Pinter's investigation is coloured with personal outrage. Like Brenton, Pinter wants to 'discover - just as the renaissance discovered humanist egocentric thought, or the middle ages discovered romantic love - a new way of

²⁴⁴ Carol Rosen, *Plays of Impasse: Contemporary Drama Set in Confining Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 21.

looking at man and his behaviour.’²⁴⁵ Pinter hopes ‘there are more positive things...to keep the critical consciousness awake’.²⁴⁶

The Reception of Pinter’s Political Persona

Pinter said:

I have referred to facts, by which I mean theatrical facts. It is true to say that theatrical facts do not easily disclose their secrets, and it is very easy, when they prove stubborn, to distort them, to make them into something else, or to pretend they never existed.²⁴⁷ (Pinter, 1970).

Pinter’s political involvement was fiercely attacked, not only in the popular press but also in scholarly books and articles: he was declining into a late propagandist period. Critics re-defined him as a ‘champagne socialist’, ‘an angry old man’, or the ‘leader of the ill-conceived 20th June Group’. The brief, directly political plays were interpreted as his end as a writer. Simon Jenkins dismissed the 1980s as ‘a fallow decade’ for Pinter;²⁴⁸ and Alan Franks mocked his political work as ‘self-parody and a series of black anti-sketches from some fugitive revue’.²⁴⁹ Benedict Nightingale wrote that Pinter was simply ‘dispatching curt, angry telegrams to the world’s audiences on behalf of Amnesty International’; and Irving Wardle evaluated the political plays as ‘hiccups’ that were ‘mere growing pains’.²⁵⁰

Pinter was infuriated by the assumption that a concern with injustice and human rights could be a symptom of writer’s block: ‘The attacks represent a well-established

²⁴⁵ Brenton, p. 12.

²⁴⁶ Gottlieb, p. 26.

²⁴⁷ Pinter, Hamburg speech, pp. x-xi.

²⁴⁸ Simon Jenkins, ‘(Pause). Enter Two Writers’, *The Times*, 30 October 1993, p. 16.

²⁴⁹ Alan Franks, ‘The Unmellowing of Harold Pinter’, *The Times*, 19 October 1991, pp. 4-6 (p. 4).

²⁵⁰ Irving Wardle, ‘The Master and the Muse’, p. 18.

tradition of mockery of the artist in this country';²⁵¹ in Pinter's words, 'a very short-sighted and also a rather sullen country'.²⁵² Recalling the six plays and eight film-scripts written during this period, he justifiably pointed to a period of intense creativity. Moreover, the political plays are written with an elegance and polish that create their own universe, their own structure and complexity. Susan Hollis Merritt asserted that, in a sense, there was now a war between Pinter, and his critics and public, 'because his customary audiences - 'bourgeois' or 'elitist' - are not politically progressive'.²⁵³ Pinter's dual activities, as a playwright and a human rights activist, revealed a more pluralistic persona than the clichéd image of the 'Pinteresque' accommodated.

Marvin Carlson states that,

a continuing point of debate in modern theatre theory has been over whether the theatre should be viewed primarily as an engaged social phenomenon or as a politically indifferent aesthetic artefact; a significant amount of contemporary theoretical discourse can still be oriented in terms of this opposition.²⁵⁴

Carlson interprets the opposition between a modern theatre based on Brechtian theory and practice ('political theatre') and theatre based on the theory and practice of Artaud ('absurd theatre', 'theatre of cruelty'). However, Pinter's political plays exceed these boundaries. The critics could not easily label him. More radically than Carlson, Edward Bond theorises the subject of theatre as 'justice', and thinks that understanding ourselves 'is a painful and difficult process but it is the imperative of theatre'.²⁵⁵ Bond was dismissive of Pinter's work in the late 1970s, attacking absurdism as decadent.

²⁵¹ Grant, p. 13.

²⁵² Gottlieb, p. 19.

²⁵³ Susan Hollis Merritt, 'Pinter and Politics', p. 144.

²⁵⁴ Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 454.

²⁵⁵ Michael Bogdanov, 'Theatre Has Only One Subject: Justice: A Rare Audience with Edward Bond', *New Statesman*, 18 October 1996, p. 36.

However, Pinter went on to use theatre, imperatively, to address the upper and middle classes - those with nominal power in contemporary society (rather than to follow Bond, Griffith or John McGrath in pursuit of new working-class audiences). His architecture of dispossession and insecurity insisted that the terror was 'their' responsibility.

Pinter's version of 'political theatre' does not involve a renunciation of the legacy of Artaud and the absurdist, but uses it - just as it reworks memories of Pinter's own earlier work - in new ways. Most significantly, perhaps, although these plays make a shared ideological statement, they are all also unique 'aesthetic artefacts' in their own right, which demand as much analysis as their predecessors.

Precisely: Reality Behind Rhetoric

All we're talking about, finally is what is real? What is real? There's only one reality, you know. You can interpret reality in various ways. But there's only one. And if that reality is thousands of people being tortured to death at this very moment and hundreds of thousands of megatons of nuclear bombs standing there waiting to go off at this very moment, then that's it and that's that. It has to be faced.²⁵⁶

In 1985, Pinter told Nick Hern 'a little story', a reality that has to be faced:

Great Hampden was a new fixture for our cricket club. We didn't know where it was. We finally found it. It turned out to be in the Chilterns, outside High Wycombe, exquisite place. It was everything that one romanticises about but, nevertheless, is true in rural England. The little village, the cricket pitch, trees, etc. And we had a lovely game of cricket.

Now, let me quote from the *Guardian*, 22 August 1984. Front page. Title is: U.S. Spends Fifty Million Dollars on British War Bunker. 'Work has started on the new war headquarters

²⁵⁶ Hern, p. 21.

for the Americans at Dawes Hill, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, the Ministry of Defence confirmed yesterday. And the three-storey underground bunker, which was first constructed in the nineteen fifties as the American nuclear strike command, is being refurbished at a cost of nearly fifty million dollars to Americans. It will replace the American peacetime headquarters at Stuttgart, Germany, in the event of war.' And what do you think is on top of that? Great Hampden. Underneath Great Hampden cricket pitch is the centre of nuclear operations in Europe. And underneath, when we play our cricket match, when every Sunday people play cricket out there, etc. etc., in the Chilterns, underneath them are thousands of people underground, and there will be more of them. And this is going to be the centre of nuclear operations in Europe. It already was a nuclear base. But it now is going to be *the centre*. So you have thousands of Americans, when you come down to it, walking about under the Chilterns, while we're playing cricket on the top. That's the story. ... It's a crucial piece of information. I do believe that, militarily, this country is as much a satellite of America as Czechoslovakia is of Russia. Now the terms are not quite the same but the structures are the same.²⁵⁷

Precisely, a sketch about the secret London, derives its source material from a non-fictional world, and seems to blend non-fiction and fiction; the play is on the dangerously thin line where there is very little distinction between the dreadful truths of real life and the fantasy world of theatre.²⁵⁸ The play is a satire on nuclear war bureaucracy. Pinter used journalistic research into what he saw as a bureaucratic conspiracy, which had permitted Hiroshima and was preparing for the holocaust of nuclear war.

None of Pinter's plays attack the reality behind rhetoric more effectively than *Precisely*. In his words, the play is 'about the nuclear bureaucracy, because I believe

²⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 21-23.

²⁵⁸ The references to *Precisely* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

there is an enormous conspiracy to hide the truth in this country'.²⁵⁹ In *Acts of War*, Tony Howard gives an account of NATO's activities to 'modernise' its nuclear equipment and meet the challenge of Soviet developments in 1979; the Thatcher Government volunteered to take the largest number of Cruise missiles deployed by NATO onto British soil. Like Pinter, Howard defines the function of theatre as the blending of politics and the depth of the human condition:

from 1979 onwards the prospect of nuclear Armageddon was discussed openly and desperately. One function of drama is to chart the relationship between political decisions and the emotional state of individuals, and if it cannot make rulers respond it may yet focus our own fears for us - and in this case perhaps help create the language that could give them form and meaning.²⁶⁰

Precisely confronts nuclear war universally; but specifically, it was written to oppose the British contribution (and Susan Hollis Merritt is wrong in suggesting that 'the sketch probably deals with the results of a nuclear war or some other nuclear catastrophe, after the war in the Persian Gulf'²⁶¹). Actually, there is a direct focus on Britain in all of Pinter's political plays - when press reviewers and scholars prefer to suggest that they refer to some 'other' places - and in this case Pinter's intention is apparent from the outset. A wave of theatrical activity emerged in 1983, and *Precisely* was written for a five-hour anti-nuclear-war gala (linking Pinter's political activism with his playwriting for the first time). This was co-organised by Susannah York, to raise money for a wide range of nuclear disarmament projects. 'Life', a theatrical show for Nuclear Disarmament, was to be staged and taped in London in November 1983. In

²⁵⁹ Hern, p. 18.

²⁶⁰ Tony Howard, 'No One Outside These Arms', in *Acts of War: The Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television since 1945*, ed. by Tony Howard and John Stokes (Hants: Scholar Press, 1996), pp. 127-44 (p. 129).

²⁶¹ Susan Hollis Merritt, 'The Outsider in Pinter and Havel', in *Pinter at Sixty*, pp. 64-75 (p. 68).

a letter (March 1983), York asked Pinter to write a sketch/monologue 'as part of the Peace Movement's efforts to prevent the siting of cruise missiles in Britain'.²⁶² While Pinter was writing *Precisely* for this, the largest ever, anti-nuclear demonstration in London, huge demonstrations were also taking place in West Germany, Italy, Austria, Sweden and Spain.

The play's mastery derives from its form; for all the savageries of its subject, it is written with the economy of a poem. It expresses the urgency of CND's argument in a brief and punning style. The two bureaucrats, Stephen and Roger, are squeezing exquisite rhetoric out of the power of their nuclear weaponry. The play implores the urgent need to become aware of the power of an exploitative ruling bureaucracy, and their concept of one final 'truth', which they have the authority to define.

Roger and Stephen have a mission, for which they are 'paid a bloody lot', to calculate 'precisely' what constitutes acceptable losses in a nuclear war. They are proud of themselves - 'good money for good brains'. But until the final sentences, the play explores bureaucratic rhetoric; and ambiguity obscures what the characters are actually discussing. However, at the end it becomes clear that their figures refer to civilian corpses:

STEPHEN It's twenty million. Dead.

ROGER You mean precisely?

STEPHEN I mean dead. Precisely. (p. 219).

Here *dead* is charged with double meaning - mass slaughter and precision - and the physical horror is inextricably linked to the urbane rhetoric exercised by those enjoying

²⁶² *The Pinter Archive*, Box: 60.

the luxury of power. Pinter briefly explores the self-satisfied word-play and duality of elite discourse, its intrigues and concealment. Pinter, too, plays on words to create a doubly ironic tone.

Initially, the two men, who sit with drinks in their club, could be discussing any calculations related to the State or, indeed, to commerce ('twenty-million'):

STEPHEN I mean, we've said it time and time again, haven't we?

ROGER Of course we have.

STEPHEN Time and time again. Twenty million. That's what we've said. Time and time again. It's a figure supported by the facts. We've done our homework. Twenty million is a fact. When these people say thirty I'll tell you exactly what they're doing - they're distorting the facts.

ROGER Scandalous. (p. 215).

It emerges that they are agreeing that the people of Britain would accept twenty million dead in a nuclear war, but that those who argue that the figure could be thirty million or even forty million are 'actively and wilfully deceiving the people'. Stephen is infuriated by these challenges to his carefully-calculated figures, and when Roger informs him that some people are even putting the figure as high as 70 million, he explodes:

STEPHEN You see what makes this whole business doubly disgusting is that the citizens of this country are behind us. They're ready to go with us on the twenty million basis. They're perfectly happy. And what are they faced with from these bastards? A deliberate attempt to subvert and undermine their security. And their faith. (pp. 218-19).

Following Stephen's outburst, Roger tries to persuade him to raise the figure of twenty million by another two in exchange for one more drink. But Stephen is insistent; his

statement must rest undisputed, for words both mark reality and contain power over life and death:

ROGER Twenty million dead, precisely?

STEPHEN Precisely. (p. 220).

Pinter has always avoided sentimentality. Most anti-nuclear propaganda is emotive and cataclysmic; but in *Precisely*, Pinter directs his moral outrage at the Establishment. Just as in *The Hothouse*, he dramatises the grotesque troubles and insecurities of the organised elites who have authority; here, Stephen's anger at finding his calculations challenged by sceptics leads him to violence: 'I'm going to recommend that they be hung, drawn and quartered. I want to see the colour of their entrails'.

The play presents a brief, frightful picture of the organisation of atrocity. For them, Armageddon is as ordinary as drinking in a pub. Pinter's irony shows how these people, who say that their work is ruled by 'facts' and 'thinking', are working against reason and conscience. They trap public thought in the empty structure of language and the 'information' citizens receive is mostly deceptions and lies.

The psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton identified an inevitable problem with plays written for and about nuclear dangers:

It is not so easy for a playwright to write about nuclear dangers and weapons without making it a propaganda tract. If you feel the danger of holocaust, you're not just talking about death and dying, but about premature death. These plays would seem to reflect the use of what I call "death equivalents" as creative metaphor. The plays seem to explore death equivalents very

strongly through the metaphor of a particular kind of illness. By no means are the plays despairing. One can use death imagery - in the direction of renewal.²⁶³

From the first, the idea of death has been one of the most common concerns Pinter has been evoking. For example, in *Old Times*, the characters persistently refer to the word in various symbolic and metaphorical expressions: they use it in their songs ('When a lovely flame dies'); Deeley refers to the 'dead centre of the auditorium'; Anna talks about Kate as if she were 'dead'; Deeley recalls being circled by men discussing 'China or death'; and Kate 'remembers' Anna lying dead. Similarly, the characters in *No Man's Land* metaphorically kill each other. But as against this symbolic and metaphorical usage, the theme of death literally and precisely refers to the victims of the state and metropolitan capitalism, physically or psychologically destroyed in Pinter's mature plays from *Precisely* to *Ashes to Ashes*. In his own words, 'Capitalism only finally succeeds when the majority of the people are considered as dead: cannot speak, move, answer, are told they're living in a benevolent society'.²⁶⁴

However, Martin Esslin found Pinter's political plays too purposive and superficial:

It is the undimensional nature of the proceedings, however clearcut the purposiveness of what is depicted, that separates these later works from the earlier ones. There is no uncertainty here about what is being shown, nor why it is shown, no multiplicity of levels of possible meanings and interpretations; everything is on the surface, immediately verifiable as what it is and what it intends.²⁶⁵

Insistently, Esslin comments on the absence of 'penumbra, the chiaroscuro, the intriguing opacity of characters and action'. Yet, Esslin disagrees with himself about

²⁶³ Cited in Carol Rosen, *Plays of Impasse*, p. 5, see Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

²⁶⁴ Billington, *The Life*, p. 374.

²⁶⁵ Esslin, 'Harold Pinter's Theatre of Cruelty', p. 35.

Precisely - a play in which Pinter studies the nature of cynicism through 'the elegance of the language and the suavity of the style'.

The New World Order (1991): is another brief satire on the use/abuse of rhetoric by Western democracies.²⁶⁶ Just as in *Precisely*, the dialogue creates its effect through implication, as the characters circle around their subject without ever naming it. Once again the exact issue becomes clear at the end of the play and this time the everyday word given a chilling double-meaning is 'shake'.

The play is only eight minutes long, but articulates a massive amount about the manipulation of meaning and the threat of physical violence that empowers those in control, and about the permanent conflict between the people and authority. Three men are in a cell-like room. One, blindfolded and barefoot, twitches, but never speaks. Des and Lionel have the power to create and control meaning arbitrarily:

LIONEL Who is this cunt anyway? What is he, some kind of peasant - or a lecturer in theology?

DES He's a lecturer in fucking peasant theology. (p. 273).

But in fact they are shrouded in 'ignorance'. They know what language means to *them*. They use it to distort the facts. They suppress convictions disputing theirs; undermine and destroy the 'other'.

DES Look at this man here, for example. He's a first-class example. See what I mean? Before he came in here he was a big shot, he never stopped shooting his mouth off, he never stopped questioning received ideas. Now - because he's apprehensive about what's about to happen to him - he's stopped all that, he's got nothing more to say, he's more or less called it

²⁶⁶ The references to *The New World Order* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

a day. I mean once - not too long ago - this man was a man of conviction, wasn't he, a man of principle. Now he's just a prick. (p. 276).

The New World Order appeared as a curtain raiser for Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, which Pinter championed in the UK, and directed. Dorfman's play (a new spirit of collectivity in Pinter) is about a woman's revenge against her torturer in post-Pinochet Chile. In Pinter's sketch, two British interrogators are getting ready to work on a silent blindfolded victim. Pinter has been characterising interrogator/torturer pairs like Des and Lionel throughout his career: from Gus and Ben in *The Dumb Waiter*, and Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party*, to Roger and Stephen in *Precisely*. All of these duos appear to be ordinary men doing their jobs. The victim in *The New World Order* is apparently an intellectual like Victor in *One for the Road*, probably a university lecturer whose crime is 'questioning received ideas'. The interrogators talk threateningly about the torture to which they will subject his wife as well. They engage in linguistic games: whether the blindfolded man is 'a cunt' or 'a prick'. The resolution lies in the last lines. Lionel feels 'so pure' about his job that he starts to cry. Des tells him 'You're right to feel pure',

DES Because you're keeping the world clean for democracy.

They look into each other's eyes.

I'm going to shake you by the hand.

DES shakes LIONEL's hand. He then gestures to the man in the chair with his thumb.

And so will he...(He looks at his watch)...in about thirty-five minutes. (pp. 277-78).

Des knows precisely how long it will take to break their victim's spirit. *Precisely* and *The New World Order* show the top and bottom levels of a system of polite 'democratic' repression - the torturers are more brutal but less dangerous. A reference to the need to defend western democracy hints at the violence that is to come.

In May 1994, three years after Pinter wrote *The New World Order*, as an engaged public intellectual, he chaired a debate between Noam Chomsky and John Pilger, at the Almeida Theatre. The forum was billed as 'The New Cold War' (because the term the 'New World Order' had been over used and was rather tired).²⁶⁷ In the discussion, Pinter drew attention to 'the question of language and how we've been educated'. He said: 'I feel that what we're faced with is a calculated and manipulated blanket on the truth, which not only infects diplomats, but also the media'. Through public activism and art Pinter has tried to search out the truth and make it public.

***One for the Road*: Total Institution as Theatrical Space**

I do not have an ideology in my plays. I just write; I'm a very instinctive writer. I don't have a calculated aim or ambition; I simply find myself writing something which then follows its own path. And that path tends to include acts of violence of one kind or another, because it is the world in which I live. And so do you.²⁶⁸

Pinter's observations and explorations in an 'alarming world'²⁶⁹ convinced him of the duty to depict and criticise authoritarian forces and oppressive institutions through his art: 'The facts that *One for the Road* refers to are facts that I wish the audience to know about, to recognise. Whereas I didn't have the same objective at all in the early days.'²⁷⁰ More than merely polemical, the cycle it initiated forms complex reflections of the dark side of the European imagination, a sharp critique of bourgeois civilisation. In particular, he reflects on the way established systems of society project images onto individuals. Moreover, the political plays now show the fantasy world of 'abroad',

²⁶⁷ A forum organised by *Red Pepper*. John Pilger said that the US created a new cold war by using an Orwellian language that would make war equal to peace. It was a war against the Third World.

²⁶⁸ Aragay, p. 7.

²⁶⁹ Pinter at Cambridge Conference.

²⁷⁰ Hern, p. 11.

‘other places’ as a massive and historically important objective reality. They explore a cultural notion of the ‘other’, the need of it, but also the terror of it. He makes the actuality of this ‘no man’s land’ British and bourgeoisie.

One for the Road is about Pinter’s concerns with authoritarianism, unjust imprisonment, the abuse of human rights, and religious intolerance.²⁷¹ The play exposes various kinds of institutional cruelty and injustice through language: a diseased language that causes nausea both for the abused and the abuser. Pinter’s preoccupation with language as a tool of distortion has never decreased. In the play, the use/abuse of language is at the core of oppression. Nicolas’s language paralyses Victor. But the torturer too becomes more and more mixed up; he estranges and deranges language to create terror to the point where he stands on the borders of madness himself:

What do you think this is? It’s my finger. This is my big finger. And this is my little finger.

This is my big finger and this is my little finger. I wave my big finger in front of your eyes.

Like this. And now I do the same with my little finger. I can also use both...at the same time.

Like this. I can do absolutely anything I like. Do you think I’m mad? My mother did. *He*

laughs. (p. 223).

Nicolas’s free-associating words create a fierce picture of the psychology of arbitrary torture, his verbal attacks enact the disturbing relationship between power and fear.

The play portrays authorised cruelty directly and physically, through brutality, murder and rape. As Pinter argues in his essay ‘Eroding the Language of Freedom’, a governing power must be assessed ‘not by what it says it is, or by what it says it intends, but by what it does.’ ‘Because language is discredited and because spirit and moral intelligence are fatally undermined, the government possesses carte blanche to do

²⁷¹ The references to *One for the Road* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

what it likes. Its officers can bug, break in, tap, burgle, lie, slander, bully and terrorise with impunity.'²⁷² More recently, Pinter told his interviewers about the 'police action', which he believed was 'a very strong brutal element in this society'.²⁷³ *One for the Road* analyses and describes the State through 'what it does':

I hear you have a lovely house. Lots of books. Someone told me some of my boys kicked it around a bit. Pissed on the rugs, that sort of thing. I wish they wouldn't do that. ... But you know what it's like - they have such responsibilities - and they feel them - they are constantly present - day and night - (p. 228).

Denying any fundamental separation between Brecht's theatre and Artaud's, *One for the Road* sets art to provoke 'tension' and 'fear' in the audience: in Pinter's words, 'Fear not only of being in the position of the given victim, but a fear also born of recognition of themselves as interrogator.'²⁷⁴ Nicolas uses his menacing and obscene language to threaten Victor. By waving his fingers, a simple act, which gives him great joy, Nicolas enjoys his absolute power and believes he is acting for his country, legitimately and properly; he wants to be loved and respected. The play creates anxiety for the actors as well. Pinter said that the dictum of the play was so real and direct that it was a 'difficult' play for the actors; they found the experience 'too oppressive [...] they found themselves in danger of being taken over by the characters. Because there's no escape once you're in there.'²⁷⁵

Yet Pinter's verbal violence does not reject beauty. Even Nicolas's ghastly lines bear smoothly flowing, poetic, energetic and potent language. His brutality is matched by fantasies of landscapes, too: 'I do love other things, apart from death. So many things.

²⁷² Pinter, 'Eroding the Language of Freedom', in *Various Voices*, pp. 173-74.

²⁷³ Gottlieb, p. 25.

²⁷⁴ Hern, p. 17.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

Nature. Trees, things like that. A nice blue sky. Blossom'. His speech is disconcertingly dominated by metaphoric, ironic and poetic images and he tells Victor, 'Let's not beat about the bush. Anything but that. *D'accord?* You're a civilised man. So am I.' He links his own dreadful territory to an energetic cricket field:

I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were, in a light hearted, even carefree manner, while another waits in the wings, silent, introspective, coiled like a puma. (p. 225).

Once again, this involved Pinter reworking a favourite metaphor with new ferocity. The traumatic scene Nicolas depicts is a metaphoric, yet a literal picture of 'the system', which applies 'silent' operations of violence to its victims. Pinter, himself, said, in 1998, that cricket is actually a 'very violent game', however 'friendly' it may seem - 'It's a very physical game, a battle is going on there'²⁷⁶ - much as Peter Hall described the inner dynamics of Pinter's mid-period dramas:

My vocabulary is all the time about hostility and battles and weaponry, but that is the way Pinter's characters operate, as if they were all stalking round a jungle, trying to kill each other, but trying to disguise from one another the fact that they are bent on murder.²⁷⁷

Disguising the fact that he, too, is 'bent on murder': 'Death. As has been noted by the most respected authorities, it is beautiful. The purest, most harmonious thing there is. Sexual intercourse is nothing when compared to it' (p. 229). Some of his speeches heighten the seductive verbal beauty of violence, employing a terrorising language beneath a civilised mask:

I've heard so much about you. I'm terribly pleased to meet you. Well, I'm not sure pleased is the right word. One has to be scrupulous about language. Intrigued. I'm intrigued. Firstly

²⁷⁶ *The South Bank Show*, 29 November 1998.

²⁷⁷ Peter Hall, 'Directing Pinter', in *Harold Pinter: You Never Heard Such Silence*, ed. by Alan Bold (London: Vision Press, 1984), pp. 19-28 (p. 22).

because I've heard so much about you. Secondly because if you don't respect me you're unique. (p. 227).

Indeed, Nicolas's 'scrupulous' style simply shows the way established institutions crush individuals who fail to conform, and how institutional power destroys individual resistance.

Roland Barthes discusses the violence of language in his essay: 'Writing the Event'. He suggests that 'Violence implies a language of violence, i.e. of a system'.²⁷⁸ In *One for the Road*, the violent and obscene language maps out the policing system of an unnamed by familiar country. Though Nicolas does not actually participate in the acts of violence detailed in the play - Nicky's murder, Victor's torture, Gila's repeated rape - his imposition of violence through language defines the dynamics of power and becomes as operative as the offstage physical cruelty. Pinter said, 'I'm quite violent, myself. I have violent feelings and...I feel quite strongly about things. On the other hand, however, I'm quite reticent.'²⁷⁹ Although Pinter is quite direct and open in this play, much of its power stems from the impression that he does not say all that he knows.

Pinter described *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road*, alike, as 'the destruction of an individual, the independent voice of an individual'.²⁸⁰ He shows that the absolutist state can only ensure its monopoly on power if it controls both 'the discursive and

²⁷⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Writing the Event', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 149-54 (p. 153).

²⁷⁹ Hern, p. 19.

²⁸⁰ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1988, p. 69.

repressive apparatus'.²⁸¹ For Pinter, the system represents a source of power that resists change. It is strictly hierarchical, and here is portrayed through the voice of Nicolas - the 'mouthpiece' of 'the man who runs this country'. When Victor, an intellectual/academic, is suspected of not fitting in with the system, he is by definition guilty of rejecting the 'guiding light'. He is faced with the pain of death, imprisonment, and social degradation. His son is killed because he spat at his country's soldiers, and his wife is raped in prison. Space has become degrading. Here is a place of physical and mental torture - with 'a first-class brothel upstairs, on the sixth floor, chandeliers' (p. 246). Pinter depicts a system that deprives individuals of their 'animal' rights.

Pinter's general determination to avoid sentimentality and direct the violence back at the Establishment is striking. As an agent of a 'predictable, formal, long-established pattern', Nicolas is a distracted character; like the torturer Lionel in *The New World Order* (1991), he is thrilled and moved by his job, which is to keep the world clean for democracy by punishing and removing those, who, in Pinter's words, are not 'like everyone else', who do not 'go along the normal path'.²⁸² Just as Lionel feels 'so pure' about murder, Nicolas describes 'death' as 'beautiful' and 'the purest, most harmonious thing there is.' He is obsessed by the eyes of those brought to him: 'They're so vulnerable. The soul shines through them' (p. 224).

Through Nicolas's chilling articulation of the 'responsibility', 'respectability', 'religion', and 'honesty' of the system, Pinter refers to a false sense of dignity - 'The

²⁸¹ Marc Silverstein, 'One for the Road, Mountain Language, and the Impasse of Politics', *Modern Drama*, 34.3(September 1991), pp. 422-40 (p. 432).

²⁸² The conversation between Pinter and Barry Davis, printed in Susan Hollis Merritt, 'The Harold Pinter Archive in the British Library', p. 20.

solemnity of the official position! Essentially to cover up murderous activity'.²⁸³

Surprisingly, however, he denied that his play would have any success as propaganda - its bleak tone does not allow any images of the victim gaining relief or revenge over the victimiser, because Pinter believed that,

Reason is not going to do anything. Me writing *One for the Road*, documentaries, articles, lucid analyses, Averell Harriman writing in the *New York Times*, voices raised here and there, people walking down the road and demonstrating. Finally it's hopeless. [...] Because the modes of thinking of those in power are worn out, threadbare, atrophied. Their minds are a brickwall.²⁸⁴

The official status quo imposes a collective, shared identity, a 'commonwealth of interest' whose only aim is to 'keep the world clean for God':

The man who runs this country announced to the country: We are all patriots, we are as one, we all share a common heritage. Except you apparently. *Pause*. I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone! (p. 232).

This whole system aims at the one-dimensional man, which Pinter developed in *The Birthday Party*. It does not want trouble; it eliminates or homogenises he who causes 'despair': 'Despair, old fruit, is a cancer. It should be castrated. Indeed I've often found that that works. Chop the balls off and despair goes out the window. You're left with a happy man. Or a happy woman' (p. 233).

Political Self-reflexivity

Pinter's earlier work has become a major resource and, indeed, a theme for his later writing; familiar characters reappear in these later political plays. During this period,

²⁸³ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 130.

²⁸⁴ Hern, p. 20.

Pinter explored self-consciousness by reworking his themes over and over in different ways. *One for the Road*, familiarly, takes place in 'A room' - but a transformed room. In 1985, BBC2 presented an early and a late room, in Kenneth Ives's production of *The Dumb Waiter* and *One for the Road*, in the same week; in Peter Kemp's words this 'offered a chance to inspect an early and a recent specimen of those cell-like spaces humming with disquiet that Pinter's drama specialises in portraying'.²⁸⁵ Similarly, Silverstein associates Pinter's early and recent writing: 'The new direction critics have discerned in *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* seems less a radical departure than a logical extension of his earlier writing'.²⁸⁶ Pinter still works, most of all, on the figure of the oppressor.

Similarly, the way images possess him and give birth to ideas has not changed. Joanne Klein emphasises Pinter's fascination with 'image as signifier';²⁸⁷ he has always used the 'image' as a source of inspiration for his writing and himself famously said,

I went into a room and saw one person standing up and one person sitting down, and a few weeks later I wrote *The Room*. I went into another room and saw two people sitting down, and a few years later I wrote *The Birthday Party*. I looked through the door into a third room, and saw two people standing up and I wrote *The Caretaker*.²⁸⁸

Pinter continues to be haunted by certain images, which evolve in his plays. He has not changed at all in his emphasis on the inspirational image and stressed in a 1996 interview that *One for the Road* began in his mind 'with a man sitting at a desk waiting

²⁸⁵ Peter Kemp, 'Disconcerting Decors', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 August 1985, p. 878.

²⁸⁶ Silverstein, 'One for the Road', p. 427.

²⁸⁷ Joanne Klein, *Making Pictures: the Pinter Screenplays* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1985), p. 3. Klein refers to Pinter's use of photographic images in his plays. She argues that 'in *Night School* the central problem of identity turns on recognition of a photograph that fixes its subject in an unfamiliar image, and in *No Man's Land*, the photograph collection serves as a key metaphoric characterisation of the past'.

²⁸⁸ Arthur Ganz, ed., *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 12

for someone to come into the room, his victim. The image of the man sitting at the desk was the concrete fact that started the play. It wasn't the idea that started the play, it was the image of the man that got it going.'²⁸⁹ Once he had visualised 'a man with a victim, an interrogator with a victim', he was 'simply *investigating* [emphasis added] what might take place'²⁹⁰.

Likewise, Pinter has never stopped writing about the family and its members. He said that *One for the Road* 'in a rather odd way, is about what happens to a family'.²⁹¹ It depicts the relationship between Authority and three imprisoned members of a family, investigating 'a state of affairs in which there are victims of torture'.²⁹² The drinks table in *One for the Road* is another common image recycled from the earlier plays. As the play's very title announces, Nicolas continually 'drinks', 'pours another' - 'I chat away, friendly, insouciant, I open the batting, as it were' - yet the deceptively amiable drinks table of *Old Times*, *No Man's Land* and *Betrayal* is here transformed into a tool of verbal torture. Nicolas chats away until Victor is broken down step by step: 'Kill me'.

The play is also a reworking of the previous gender issues in a masculine, patriarchal society in which he associates maleness with language and power, and femaleness with silence and powerlessness. Nicolas defines a good citizen as someone who will die for his country and his God. As he questions Gila, the victim's wife, he terrorises her when she mentions that she met her husband in her father's room:

Your father was a wonderful man. His country is proud of him. He's dead. He was a man of honour. He's dead. Are you prepared to insult the memory of your father?

²⁸⁹ Aragay, in *Various Voices*, p. 5.

²⁹⁰ Hern, p. 14.

²⁹¹ Gussow, *Conversations*, October 1989, p. 92.

²⁹² Hern, p. 8.

Pause.

Are you prepared to defame, to debase, the memory of your father? Your father fought for his country. I knew him. I revered him. Everyone did. He believed in God. He didn't *think*, like you shitbags. He *lived*. He was iron and gold. He would die, he would die, he would die, for his country, for his God. And he did die, he died, he died, for his God. You turd. To spawn such a daughter. What a fate. Oh, poor, perturbed spirit, to be haunted forever by such scum and spittle. How do you dare speak of your father to me? I loved him, as if he were my own father. (pp. 240-41).

He also defines the outcast, the fool, the 'prick':

Your son is...seven. He's a little prick. You made him so. You have taught him to be so. You had a choice. You could have encouraged him to be a good person. Instead, you encouraged him to be a little prick. You encouraged him to spit, to strike at soldiers of honour, soldiers of God. *Pause.* Oh well...in one way I suppose it's academic. (p. 244).

Mireia Aragay correctly makes a distinction between Pinter's early and more recent characters: 'Brutality and violence are often related to the male characters, whereas the women, especially in the 1960s plays, are enigmatic, mysterious; they have a kind of staying power that the men don't seem to have.' In the same interview with Aragay, Pinter emphasised a transformation: that the female characters 'tend in the later plays to be victims of male brutality'.²⁹³ He believes that 'men are more brutal than women' but he does not sentimentalise women: 'Women are very tough. But if you look at what has happened in the world since day one, the actual acts of brutality have been dictated by men. ... in my plays women have always come out in one way or another as the people I feel something towards, which I don't feel towards men'.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Aragay, p. 7.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

The political works deliberately emphasise the same characteristics as the earlier plays but reverse Pinter's previous practices. The 'Pinteresque' interrogation scene, which is amusing in *The Birthday Party* and so farcical in *The Hothouse* that Pinter could extract it and present it as a revue sketch (*Interview*), is terrifying in *One for the Road*.

While the earlier plays operate on the gender linguistic acts of man and woman, here individual freedom is suppressed by dictatorial and concealed authorities. The previous plays articulated the ways men invade space, and the various ways men emotionally or physically try to take over - but, ultimately, fail to possess - women.

Evaluating *One for the Road* as 'pretty remorseless', Pinter insisted on its 'non-specification'. The characters' national and social identity and their 'offence' are not identified. The play goes beyond its specific subject, the imprisoned writer, and has a much larger purpose: it includes all prisoners of conscience and those whose rights are being violated by 'the state' throughout the world's great cities. Pinter continued to investigate the facts behind the nauseating facade of the 'civilised' metropolis, especially in *Mountain Language*, where he went on to use the language of the metropolis as a vehicle to hold the soul prisoner, and as a means of spiritual conquest.

Mountain Language: Colonising the Country through the Capital's Language

Like *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* shows the horrors and dangers of life in totalitarian - or seemingly democratic but essentially authoritarian - countries.²⁹⁵ In his meditation on the 'civilised' West, Pinter's analysis very much corresponded to the Post-colonial theorists' determination to expose the realities under the universalistic discourse of democracy, power, knowledge. While Post-colonial discourse creates a

²⁹⁵ The references to *Mountain Language* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

space in which a theatre produces only a utopian suggestion, Pinter shows that one can work towards that utopia. Like the theorists Edward Said, Chakravorty Spivak, Chinua Achebe, Samir Amin, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Pinter criticises a concept of imperialism, led by the USA and parts of Europe, masquerading as democracy. Through different means, he tried to support Third World experiments of 'collective theatre', 'a theatre of the oppressed', by bringing history to the fore through drama: their struggle for a cultural identity. Pinter's 1980s plays were a sharp critique of the First World as an armed power, which sees in democracy a real threat. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o commented, in 1986, 'Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today. It could even lead to holocaust.'²⁹⁶ He discussed the effect of a 'cultural bomb' that aims to 'annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves', a cultural bomb that makes them see their 'past as one wasteland of non-achievement'.²⁹⁷ Pinter's political plays, especially *Mountain Language*, strongly allied themselves to this global discourse of protest.

Pinter's affinities with the Post-colonial thinkers led him to contribute to the discourse, and he updated its terms for the twenty-first century. In his speech 'The Nato Action in Serbia', Pinter redefined 'imperialism'. He acknowledged that some of his audience might think that the term 'no longer means anything.' But Pinter believed that 'Imperialism remains an active and vibrant force in the world today':

Using the vehicle of financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, imperialism is in a position to dictate policy to smaller states which rely on their credit. Through their domination of the world market, the imperialist powers drive down

²⁹⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (London: James Currey Ltd, 1986), p. 2.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

prices for raw materials and keep the smaller states impoverished. The more these countries borrow, the more destitute and dependent they become. Palmerston said of the British Empire, 'It has neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies. It has only permanent interests'.²⁹⁸

'Imperialism' was not the only concept whose meaning was changing. Talking about 'democracies' selling arms for internal repression, he said: 'I wonder what the term "democracy" actually means. [...] The word democracy begins to stink'.²⁹⁹

For some Post-colonial theorists, 'language' is a dialect backed up by an army. For example, Chakravorty Spivak disputes the institutionally established forms of knowledge, and argues that there is no universalistic discourse without military support. Similarly, Amin discusses the notion of democracy which is, in fact, *policed democracy*, and while Ngugi defines colonialist control through military conquest and political dictatorship, he sees more dangerous effects practised through the vehicle of language: 'The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation.'³⁰⁰ This idea lies at the core of *Mountain Language*.

In *Mountain Language*, Pinter writes about a culture of total repression - presenting a people who have lost their dignity. A minority culture in a rural area is colonised and maltreated by the capital. The capital's language disables the minority's dialect. The play is set in a military prison whose location is never specified. Officers abuse women waiting to visit their husbands/sons/fathers in prison and order, 'You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place' (p.

²⁹⁸ Pinter, 'The Nato Action in Serbia'.

²⁹⁹ Aragay p. 11.

³⁰⁰ Thiong'o, p. 9.

255). Pinter said that the play is 'about suppression of language and the loss of freedom of expression'.³⁰¹ *Mountain Language* exemplifies the systematic suppression of a minority's language. The capital's language has to be bowed to, otherwise the victims are faced with humiliation and corporal punishment.

Written with the economy and eloquence of poetry, *Mountain Language* vocalises the Post-colonial debate artistically. Here, literally, language is colonised by an army. Of course, language has always been a crucial issue in Pinter's plays - his characters exist, fantasise, remember, dominate via the medium of words – however, *Mountain Language* is a production of a counter-discourse, in which to speak is to tyrannise. Here, Pinter supports the same objective:

Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, [...] and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.³⁰²

Mountain Language, like Brian Friel's *Translations*, is about the political admission that linguistic dominance is a form of imperialism. Roland Barthes, in his essay, 'The War of Languages', theorises the relationship between language and power:

In contemporary societies, the simplest division of languages bears on their relation to Power. There are languages which are articulated, which develop, and which are marked in the light (or the shadow) of Power, of its many state, institutional, ideological machineries; I shall call these *enocratic* languages or discourses. And facing them, there are languages which are

³⁰¹ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1988, p. 68.

³⁰² Thiong'o, p. 16.

elaborated, which feel their way, and which are themselves outside of Power and/or against Power; I shall call these *acritic* languages or discourses.³⁰³

In the light of Barthes's division of languages, we can see a commitment in *Mountain Language* to formulate the distinction between a powerful capital/encritic language which is constructed around ideology, and the minority's acritic language, which is outside of Power. The language of the capital is empowered to produce state-controlled information and to destroy alternatives.

As the play's title suggests, the governmental/military manipulation of information erodes the language and the dignity of the mountain people. The Officer and the Sergeant talk with the voice of the military establishment. Their words establish definitions. They try to terrify the women and make them feel insecure via a language they do not understand. The Sergeant says:

Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are enemies of the State. They are shithouses. (p. 255).

The Officer continues to humiliate the women and exterminate their language and individuality, to take them further from their selves and incorporate them into the capital's self: As Jeanne Colleran points out: 'The language described as dead becomes dead'.³⁰⁴

Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military

³⁰³ Barthes, 'The War of Languages', in *The Rustle of Language*, pp. 106-10 (p. 107).

³⁰⁴ Jeanne Colleran, 'Disjuncture as Theatrical and Postmodern Practice in Griselda Gambaro's *The Camp* and Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language*', in *Pinter at Sixty*, pp. 49-63 (p. 61).

decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists. Any questions? (pp. 255-56).

Mountain Language is much more than a study of the traumatic effects of torture applied by authority, even though this is a serious part of Pinter's intention. This time, despite the aura of constant violence, there is no use of onstage violence. Instead, the abuser uses obscene language - and Pinter believes that 'those old Anglo-Saxon words are still very strong'; the Sergeant has a stick, which he does not have to use, 'He uses the words instead'.³⁰⁵

Mountain Language portrays an authoritarian state whose major aim is to create a patriarchal, one-dimensional society. It presents human beings at the mercy of the cruellest, most incomprehensible, illogical social order, which does not allow variety or resistance, and whose only aim is to control thought and language. The central authority punishes and assimilates the intellectuals and the ethnic minority alike, because they are equally non-conformist. The prison is divided into two sections to identify the rural prisoners robbed of their natural linguistic rights, and the prisoners from the city: the intellectuals. Thus even amongst the oppressed, the system imposes a clear-cut distinction between the city/capital and the mountain people. Failure to conform to their segregation is treated as a crime in itself: when the Young Woman, Sara Johnson, says she does not speak the mountain language, and the Officer sees on her papers that her husband 'doesn't come from the mountains. He's in the wrong batch' (p. 257), he and his Sergeant 'slowly circle her. The Sergeant puts his hand on her bottom' and asks her 'what language do you speak with your arse?' Pinter talks about the human capacity to endure here: 'And she has to bear this. [...] She ignores it

³⁰⁵ Ford, pp. 4-6.

- doesn't scream or faint or do anything, just ignores it. I admire her very much. Seeing this act of control on her part, they discuss her arse, as it were, in those terms, merely to offend,'³⁰⁶ Pinter argues that the aim of the militarised state is to diminish both those whom it classifies as minority and those who consciously decline to conform. Again, the way that his plays of the 1980s treat the intelligentsia as a significant class marks a major development from *The Birthday Party* or *The Homecoming* where they are treated as impotent, powerless and pretentious fantasists. The change reflects Pinter's growing belief that the failure of the post-war educated middle classes to contribute to the moral and intellectual growth of Britain, especially in the Thatcher period, was a profound problem that must be addressed.

Following 'The Prison Wall', Pinter takes his audience into the 'Visitor's Room', where the old woman, whose hand was bitten by the prison dog in the first scene, is visiting her son. Now the Guard hits her because she cannot speak the language of the capital. As she speaks to her son in the only language she knows, the Guard 'jabs her with a stick', shouting at her that it is 'forbidden'. Then the forbidden conversation is heard in the half-light as a voice-over; these two languages are, in fact, to our ears, identical.

The play moves, through short, sharp, brutal scenes into the darkness in which we overhear the lovers' discourse. In the third scene, 'Voice in the Darkness', the Young Woman, a 'fucking intellectual', visits her husband, the 'hooded man'. The lovers try to defeat the state by living positively in defiance of its imperatives. Colleran argues that their resistance is achieved by means of 'nondiscursive, nonrepresentational

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 4

juxtaposition, it is more than anything else *tonal* rather than verbal or visual'.³⁰⁷

However, here Pinter stresses the universality of speech. As opposed to the mimetic spaces of the prison wall and visitors' room, this key scene evokes diegetic spaces, recalling the lyrical pastorals of the memory plays but giving them new meaning; this is the only scene where two characters use Pinter's idiosyncratically simple, poetic language:

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.

MAN'S VOICE We are out on a lake.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE It is spring.

MAN'S VOICE I hold you. I warm you.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE When my eyes open I see you above me and smile. (p. 263).

The lovers' speech verbalises an urgent beauty. Their poetry offers and shelters a model of a possible idyllic counter-society. In a play where all the characters feel threatened, the only protection is found in pastoral language. However, the idea of nature as protection exists only briefly, in darkness; the hooded man is destroyed offstage and later dragged off by the Guard. As Lefebvre argues, 'It is becoming impossible to escape the notion that nature is being murdered by 'anti-nature' - by abstraction, by signs and images, by discourse'.³⁰⁸ The official language overpowers and exterminates the lovers' lyrical whisper. At the end of the scene the Sergeant tells the Young Woman that she has come in the wrong door:

It must be the computer. The computer's got a double hernia. But I'll tell you what - if you want any information on any aspect of life in this place we've got a bloke comes into the office every Tuesday week, except when it rains. He's right on top of his chosen subject. Give him a tinkle one of these days and he'll see you all right. His name is Dokes. Joseph Dokes. (p. 264).

³⁰⁷ Colleran, p. 61.

³⁰⁸ Lefebvre, p. 71.

Startlingly, the Young Woman responds with *his* own obscene language: 'Can I fuck him? If I fuck him, will everything be all right?' (p. 264). Pinter commented: 'It's a very crude, brutal world that she's entered into and I think she's having a very tough time, but she despises it so thoroughly that she is able to use the language with no trouble at all. She's also tough.'³⁰⁹

Pinter delivers the punch-line of the play via poetry - the remnant of the pastoral tradition linking nature with faith and emotion. The pastoral here is colonised by an authoritarian metropolis but survives in the imagination of two victimised characters as - in Raymond Williams's phrase - 'an idealisation, based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, served to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time.'³¹⁰ The tone of the voice-overs offers 'a moment of transcendence, as if a small bud were pushing through the rest of the muck'.³¹¹ Even the awfulest destruction cannot conquer the human soul. Applying the vision of the memory plays with new urgency, here Pinter reinterprets the pastoral in terms of his ideological values - to quote Terry Gifford:

The pastoral can be a mode of political critique of present society, or it can be a dramatic form of unresolved dialogue about the tensions in that society, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension.³¹²

The exploitation of the 'mountain people' demands that their language and landscape are forbidden and remain only as an imaginary utopian realm. As against the fantasy-reality of the memory plays, the pastoral here formulates a relationship between fictional and empirical truth. Pinter's plays of the early 1970s were lyrical, and the

³⁰⁹ Ford, p. 4.

³¹⁰ Williams, *The Country*, p. 60.

³¹¹ Perloff, p. 15.

³¹² Gifford, p. 11.

characters used their imagination freely to create lyrical discourse; *Mountain Language* forbids speech itself. This political anti-pastoral calls for a poetry that will return to speak to contemporary concerns.

The final scene takes the audience back to the visitors' room. Recalling Vaclav Havel's satire, *The Memorandum*, the regulations governing language change suddenly. The mountain language can be spoken. Casually, the Guard tells the Prisoner, who sits trembling with a bloody face, that the mountain language now has official recognition: 'Oh, I forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice' (p. 265). But the old woman remains still and silent all through the scene. She has lost her ability to speak. The Prisoner pleads with his mother to talk until he himself falls on his knees and begins to gasp and shake violently. The Sergeant studies the Prisoner shaking on the floor and tells the Guard: 'Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up' (p. 267). In John Lutterbie's opinion the mother's silence acts as an act of resistance, opposing Authority in 'a space defining the interface of opposites'.³¹³ On the other hand, her silence, the Prisoner's collapse, and the Sergeant's mockery suggested the final futility of resistance to Terry Eagleton, who said Pinter's celebrated silence had become 'The muteness of a whole people'.³¹⁴

Mountain Language, like its predecessor *The Birthday Party*, is about the suppression of local differences in favour of a centralised official culture. Stanley, too, is finally unable to speak. He makes a last effort to communicate but has no longer 'access to his

³¹³ Lutterbie, p. 468.

³¹⁴ Eagleton, p. 20.

tongue'.³¹⁵ When Goldberg and McCann reduce him to silence, the form of mental murder they commit is similar to the eroding of the mountain language: 'You're dead, no juice in you, you're nothing but an odour' (*The Birthday Party*). But in early Pinter, it was possible to regard such horror stories as symbolic fantasies. *Mountain Language* cannot be seen as anything but an accusation. It derives from Pinter's campaigning against ethnic and human rights abuses in states supported by the USA and NATO, but its applicability to the British scene was also inescapable. Discussing Clause 28, which he said, 'singles out the homosexual section for censorship and repression', Pinter stated 'Something that could be described as uncommon or slightly out of the norm is regarded as an alien force, something to be suppressed and disciplined'.³¹⁶

The suppression expressed in *Mountain Language* is applied internally by state institutions and globally by forces which are sometimes subtle (cf. *Precisely*), sometimes savage; and Pinter indicts a universal system of oppression. Many countries, in their history, have suppressed minority languages. Friel's *Translations* reminded British and Irish audiences of the abolition of Gaelic in the nineteenth century and it was instantly translated into many other languages with a history of linguistic oppression - and indeed a Welsh version of *Translations* recalled the English attempt to prohibit the Welsh language in the last century. Pinter's play is set in a contemporary political prison and a brutalised countryside, whose locations are not identified. Although Pinter carefully undermines the political and geographical reference, and in spite of the fact that the play is set in an unspecified totalitarian state, there are numerous English allusions: the manner and diction are consistently English like, the names (Charley and Sara Johnson, Joe Dokes), the references to Babycham, 'Lady

³¹⁵ James Campbell, 'The Slow Unbaffling of the Pinterwatchers', *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 March 1994, p. 18.

³¹⁶ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1988, p. 69.

Duck Muck'. David Pryce-Jones, however, argued that the British connotations fail because Pinter's prison state has no connection with the British system.³¹⁷

But most importantly, *Mountain Language*, like *One for the Road*, explores a rhetoric of nationalism. Both account for nationalism as an ideological configuration. The Power in both plays aims at a unity and control of national consciousness. Like Pinter, Lefebvre suggested in his *Production of Space* that 'Nationhood implies *violence* - the violence of a military space, be it feudal, bourgeois, imperialist, or some other variety.'³¹⁸ And *Mountain Language* is an urban nightmare with uniforms and hooded hostages - working for national unity while destroying the 'other', the minority, the female, the rural.

Reworking earlier works in which the 'masculine' enjoys a powerful status while the 'feminine' is associated with powerlessness, space in *Mountain Language*, both territorial and linguistic, is masculinised by the authoritarian and official speech of the 'military decree'. However, in the previous plays, territorial and linguistic space was crucial for the conflict between male and female possession; now the ultimate owner is the military power. In *Mountain Language*, individuals have no rights and no command of the spaces they inhabit. Where *The Birthday Party* showed the individual stripped from his surrogate Mother and reduced to speechlessness, here an entire social minority, the mountain people, are banned from the use of their mother tongue, the most essential proof of human existence.

³¹⁷ David Pryce-Jones, 'Expressions of Independence: a review of *Mountain Language*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 November 1988, p. 1228.

³¹⁸ Lefebvre, p. 112.

The military are granted complete power over space and language: to dominate and define. Chinua Achebe had asked in 1975, questioning a similar hostility between central authority and his own minority nation, 'Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling.'³¹⁹ In this sense, the play is a reworking of one of Pinter's recurrent themes - betrayal. Self-betrayal transforms into enforced betrayal. The mountain people, the weakest and most vulnerable members of society, are not allowed to shape or discuss their own lives in their own language, for this would result in mutual comprehension, which is seen as being dangerous to the good government of a country and its institutions.

Pinter liberates himself from the 'room': 'There's a room in *Mountain Language*, but there is also a corridor. What I was talking about was freeing myself.'³²⁰ And the usual rhythm of pauses and silences evolves into an explicitly political discourse. Accused of resorting to the crude to shock, both in *One for the Road* and in *Mountain Language*, Pinter denied this, repeating that his only aim in writing was to explore the images that came into his mind. But by 1988, he was finding some of these images appalling: 'So they shock me into life, and into the act of writing.'³²¹ He believed that *Mountain Language*, with its poetic economy, '*simply does something*'.³²²

³¹⁹ Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and the English Language', in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: 1975).

³²⁰ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1988, p. 78.

³²¹ Ford, p. 4.

³²² Summers, 'A Conscientious Objector', p. 19.

Party Time

In 1991, *Party Time* continued Pinter's investigation of the *private* roots of power, the need to dominate and mislead.³²³ It dropped a familiar cast of Pinter types into the new, savage political map he had been drawing and re-examined life in the modern city. As with the preceding plays, *Party Time* depicts a sinister dimension of power at the centre, which constrains and unifies in the name of order and collectivity. The play is set back in the metropolis - the hub of political power and social dislocation. It presents a 'bunch' of people at a party, who have influence, who are in charge of regulating the city.

The city emerged in Engels as an 'ambiguous compromise between the outside and the inside, between the crowd and the individual, between mind and character, and finally between idea and experience.'³²⁴ *Party Time*, too, draws a deceptive reconciliation between a repressed 'outside' and an authoritarian 'inside', between the ruling elite and the oppressed individual. Pinter is particularly interested in the image that 'remains of the distinction between what happens upstairs at the party and what's going on down there in the street'.³²⁵ While the party of the title takes place in a flat, outside society is 'purifying' itself with police round-ups.

Pinter started with the idea of a party in an elegant and wealthy apartment in a town somewhere. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that outside in the streets an act of oppression is going on which has actually been organised by the people at the party. It is never really explicit, but they are responsible for the acts of military and police

³²³ The references to *Party Time* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

³²⁴ Blanchard, p. 36.

³²⁵ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 153

repression, which they never discuss. But apart from a few short references, they never discuss the streets. The partygoers are happy. They know that the country is under control. As opposed to the short, sharp, brutal images of *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language*, *Party Time* is verbally more 'Pinteresque': here the audience and the characters are quite distanced from the violence. *Party Time* gives a sharp, sarcastic picture of a group of well-dressed people who benefit from, and provide political support for, authoritarian government.

There are two doors. One belongs to the party room, and the other, in dim light, has a symbolic existence and is never used by the partygoers. The dim light from this door intensifies briefly three times in the course of the play. The party takes place in Gavin's flat, set in a fashionable area in the unspecified city. The guests are from the powerful upper class. Like the other political plays, *Party Time* consists of short cinematic scenes - a series of shots, each presenting a fragment of the conversation stemming from the various groups of guests; each encounter is brought to the audience's attention by sharp lighting changes. In the foreground, it is the turn of Terry, the most vulgar character, to talk about 'purity' - about a 'pure comfort', high-class health club of which he is a member. Amongst the chatter, Dusty, Terry's young wife, asks what has happened to her missing brother, Jimmy; it is a warning of some impending menace. Despotically, Terry and his friend Gavin tell Dusty that nothing has happened to Jimmy, and nobody will discuss it. As the conversation about the club - which has a wonderful bar, pool and catering - goes on, Melissa, who has just arrived at the party, describes the dead town that she encountered on her way: there is nobody on the streets apart from some soldiers who stopped her driver at a roadblock. Gavin and Terry purposefully ignore Melissa's bewilderment about the outside world. They cover

up her account of the dead town and the soldiers. She insists that she keeps hearing things and that she does not know what to believe. Terry overpowers her and lapsing into the sexual contempt familiar from the previous plays, tells her to stop talking about these things - 'spread by pricks about pricks' (p. 288).

Pinter continues to draw symbolic pictures from the party. The women are proud to be part of an elegant society of beautifully dressed people but the voice from outside impinges upon their vain dialogues. Charlotte's surprise at what's going on in the street is ignored by Fred who simply says he owes his good looks to the clean life he is leading. Pinter relates the inside and the outside through sharp, polarised images. The superficial respectability of the party is dominated by physical competitiveness and domestic violence. In one corner, Liz and Charlotte talk about another woman's technique for seducing a man Liz fancies. Liz casually threatens violence: 'I could have cut her throat, that nymphomaniac slut' (p. 290). Domestic violence marks Dusty and Terry's marriage: she is threatened by her husband for asking too many questions in public about her missing brother. Terry bursts out, 'This question of what has happened to Jimmy is not up for discussion, it's not on anyone's agenda' (p. 296). He tells the others he is going to give her 'a real talking to' when he gets her home. Gavin's response to Terry's outburst is characteristic: he says that the root of so many ills is uncontrollable wives. Marital cruelty is the mark of Terry's despotic character. When Dusty taunts him with an imaginary lover who comes from a courteous, caring world, he launches into an angry list of dozens of ways to kill Dusty and her 'lot'. His methods of killing indicate that he is part of an organised system: he says they could suffocate people at a given signal, or - a key image - poison all the mother's milk in the world.

For Pinter, by the 1980s, private relationships echo public brutality. Violence and unease in personal relationships are symbolic of the coercive employment of state violence. Fred and Douglas talk about the state that the country is in; their conversation reveals that the soldiers stand ready to provide an iron-cast national peace, 'No leaks. No draughts. [...] A cast iron peace'. They employ the threat of violence to clean up society. Their mission is made clear by Melissa's description of the exclusive club: 'Inspired by a moral sense, a moral awareness, a set of moral values, which is unshakeable, rigorous, fundamental, constant.' *Party Time* describes the compulsion to impose a no man's land on others.

As the play progresses, it becomes apparent that the first-class club Terry has been talking about is a metaphor for an authoritarian political ideology. It is real value, he puts his money in and knows what he is getting in return: 'Gold-plated service in all departments', 'You won't find voices raised in our club. People don't do vulgar and sordid and offensive things. And if they do we kick them in the balls and chuck them down the stairs with no trouble at all' (p. 310). Gavin agrees to join the 'wonderful club', thanks the guests for the enjoyable party and 'congenial company', and ends by apologising to them for the 'traffic problems' the roadblocks cause. He assures them that the country will provide a 'normal, secure and legitimate service very soon'. (p. 313).

At the close of the party, the room lights go down. The light from the unused half-open door burns in. All the characters are still, in silhouette, and Jimmy, lightly dressed, comes out of the light. Jimmy's monologue closes the play on a spiritual plane. His

lonely, isolated figure - contrasting sharply with the groupings of Gavin's guests - explicitly demonstrates for the audience the nature of the regime and its 'moral mission'. Jimmy's speech, a stream of consciousness, directly expresses the feelings of the suffocated oppressed individual:

Sometimes I hear things. Then everything is quiet. When everything is quiet I hear my heart. When the terrible noises come I don't hear anything. Don't hear don't breathe am blind. What am I? Sometimes a door bangs. I hear voices, then it stops. Everything stops. It all stops. It all closes. It closes down. It shuts. It all shuts. It shuts down. I see nothing at any time any more. I sit sucking the dark. It's what I have. The dark is in my mouth and I suck it. It's the only thing I have. It's mine. It's my own. I suck it. (pp. 313-14).

The half-open door symbolises the suppressed and silenced people, their voices passivised by power. Finally, the exterior world colonises the interior space - if only in an intangible form. It is cathartic, but hypnotic, to see that the symbolic half-open doorway into a better world can only be crossed through death.

The play has two separate clear-cut spaces, which do not interact or communicate. On the one hand, there is the ruling 'crowd', whose main interest is leisure: 'clubbing', 'boating', feeling alive with 'the warm wind of Siroccos on a holiday island', which makes them 'feel ten years younger'. On the other hand there is an 'other' group: the oppressed, whose voices have been silenced. A whisper from outside is drowned out by the party, just as the 'official' language reduced the lovers' talk to a whisper in *Mountain Language*. However, as the guests try to ignore the growing threat of a military presence beyond their walls, their own conversation ironically becomes more and more oppressed.

The play is a savagely satirical picture of a powerful elite. It is not set in London, yet it is. Although *Party Time* is a metaphor rather than literal truth, it gives a specific picture of an insincere ruling class, which ironically claims to be leading a clean life. The selective realism of *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* is replaced by an approach that offers a vision of society rather than an illustration of the workings of a tyrannical regime. Indeed, when these characters speak of a 'regime' they mean a slimming course - and the diet they will give the people - just as the exclusive health club finally emerges as the club with which they will beat their country into silence. Melissa idolises it:

The swimming and the tennis clubs died because they were based on ideas which had no moral foundation, [...] But *our* club, *our* club - is a club which is activated, which is inspired by a moral sense, a moral awareness, a set of moral values which is - I have to say - unshakeable, rigorous, fundamental, constant. (p. 311).

Party Time is a play of opposites. It is about the inside and the outside, the crowd and the individual, the escapist and the oppressive reality, physical space and spiritual space. Pinter identifies the city as the centre of political power, and oppression - a world of brute masculine power. He investigates the horror in the 'civilised' metropolis. He portrays an urban society of contempt and misery. The play draws connections between the socio-economic inequalities and the structures of the social order. The party people, the political elite, are comfortable and rich in the midst of misery.

Party Time annoyed many critics and audiences, for it addressed the 'in-crowd', the theatre-going middle-classes themselves. Although there is a direct line from his earlier

plays into *Party Time*, this time the anger was directed at those whom Pinter claimed were directly responsible for terror but were indifferent to it. In theatre, the audience is always implicated, but until *Party Time* it was not hard to retreat. Katherine Burkman noticed a shift in the way Pinter dealt with the room here. She argued that 'Now it has to do with how we have been dispossessed of the room. It is to do with homelessness and exile in the modern condition.'³²⁶ Irving Wardle commented: '*Party Time* may be unlocalised, but it reflects the reported iniquities of Africa and Latin America in the perspective of a London he knows inside out.'³²⁷ As we have seen, Wardle charged that the preceding political plays were simply poor, but that with *Party Time*, Pinter 'has at last constructed a bridge between his dramatic world and the world of his political conscience'.³²⁸ Actually, *Party Time* is exactly like its predecessors - it presents Pinter's vision of human behaviour - the discord between the rulers and the silenced.

However, Pinter told Nicholas Hern, 'Finally it's hopeless. There's nothing one can achieve.'³²⁹ Yet Pinter's own words do not really suggest he had become dispirited by what the theatre can achieve. Pinter defended his political consciousness. He talked about the contempt that actors had been facing in Britain, an abusive vocabulary that Thatcherism developed:

The actors are called 'luvvies' in this country, meaning that actors call each other darling, etc. It's almost a deliberate act of demeaning the profession on the part of someone or other, the media. This came more or less from Thatcher days, when art is considered to be a load of

³²⁶ Cited in Alan Franks, 'The Unmellowing of Harold Pinter', p. 6.

³²⁷ Irving Wardle, 'Pinter's Giant Small Talk', *Independent on Sunday*, 10 November 1991, p. 23.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Hern, p. 20.

rubbish. Actors on the whole know more about political issues than any other body of people.³³⁰

Peter Hall expressed his worries in a similar tone to Pinter:

We are a very stupid country: we are extremely proud of our arts, and our prowess in the arts. Yet we suspect our artists and love to demean them. We created the greatest theatre culture in history at the time of Shakespeare. And thirty years later we pulled it down in the name of Puritanism, utterly destroying it. Four hundred years later, after the great post-war renaissance in the arts, a whole Thatcherite vocabulary was developed to denigrate what had been achieved. Words like 'luvvies'; 'whingeing'; 'welfare state mentality; 'begging bowl'. There is now a whole culture of denigration used by Arts Ministers and by both the popular and serious press.³³¹

In Pinter's words Britain is a very 'short-sighted', 'sullen' country. He criticises 'the customary British suspicion of the 'intelligentsia' - that is to be 'mocked', 'refused' and 'kicked in the teeth':

I think that with Thatcherism we had a disaster here. It *was* a disaster and *remains* a disaster. And we're not out of Thatcherism.³³²

He continued:

We have a really profound establishment here, which has been around for a very long time, with profound traditions, and one of the essential elements of those traditions is mockery of the artistic or the intellectually curious. Certainly the politically curious, or politically questioning.³³³

In his 1989 article, 'Eroding the Language of Freedom', Pinter stated his anxiety over the 'encroachments of fundamental freedoms' through an erosion of language

³³⁰ Pinter at Cambridge Conference.

³³¹ Peter Hall, 'Theatre under Threat', in *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, ed. by Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers, pp. 99-110 (p.103).

³³² Gottlieb, p. 19.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p.25.

authorised by state power in a 'short-sighted', 'sullen' Britain. Pinter believed that 'the root cause of this state of affairs is that for the last forty years our thought has been trapped in hollow structures of language, a stale, dead but immensely successful rhetoric.' He detected 'a defeat of the intelligence and of the will', authorised by the discourse of 'law and order'.³³⁴ Pinter argued that the practice of imposing power in England was as brutally repressive as in any totalitarian country. In his political works, where he re-explores a political no-man's-land, he articulates how 'language is discredited' and how the spirit and moral intelligence are threatened

³³⁴ Pinter, 'Eroding the Language of Freedom', pp. 173-74.

CHAPTER FIVE

From Room to Tomb: *Moonlight*

Pinter has been presenting himself in the role of a writer in Britain who does engage very publicly in discussion of international affairs, which is not a tradition in England. From 1970 onwards, he engaged in cultural and millennial crises. He stopped being 'a man of leisure'; he had become an 'activist', a 'fighter', an investigator. Just after he wrote his first major directly political play, *One for the Road*, he said that he did not know what he was going to write next. He told Bryan Appleyard that he felt 'there will be no writing, no entertainment...in a very short time unless we recognise the realities of the world in which we live.'³³⁵ Therefore, his plays and film-scripts at the time focused on the atrocities in the world,³³⁶ and showed that no easy optimism was possible. Additionally, he focused both his public life and his art on what he described as the pollution caused by American imperialism. He suggested a revolutionist strain and resisted the instrumentalism and 'abstraction' exercised by governments, 'We live in a very manipulated world and the great deal is the abstracting of reality'.³³⁷

In 1993, a decade of directly political plays was followed by *Moonlight*, which in the *Guardian's* words would 'come as a shock to those who have lately pigeonholed him as a writer of bruising polemic'.³³⁸ Although *Moonlight* made history as Pinter's first full length work for the theatre since *Betrayal*, it should rather be seen as an interval from politics where Pinter re-explores the interior landscapes of his early work, where

³³⁵ Bryan Appleyard, 'The New Light that Burns within Harold Pinter: An Interview', *The Times*, 16 March 1984, p. 13.

³³⁶ *Precisely* (1983) presented an apocalyptic picture of the world, and *Handmaid's Tale* (1990) suggested a futuristic dystopia in North America.

³³⁷ Pinter at Cambridge Conference.

³³⁸ Billington, 'Pinter's Most Moving Work', *Guardian*, 8 September 1993, p. 1.

he returns to the pastoral as a landscape of 'retreat' and fantasy.³³⁹ Indeed, the play's title suggests a pastoral realm. The heroine retreats into Nature through linguistic idealisation. Nevertheless, the 'non-political' *Moonlight*, followed by the 'political' *Ashes to Ashes*, clearly shows a temporary change of direction in Pinter, for Rebecca in *Ashes to Ashes* will put up a spirited defence of Pinter's political views once again. *Moonlight* can best be understood as Pinter briefly leaving politics to explore new horizons - 'his own private griefs and anguish in the most nakedly and unashamedly emotional of all his plays',³⁴⁰ Indeed, the play is a reworking of Pinter's own roots both thematically and stylistically. For example, he revisits the idea of becoming 'family exiles', a theme he had already explored in *Family Voices*. Thus *Moonlight* returns to a more personal family setting where there are three separate 'playing areas' on stage, and as in *Silence*, the characters' narrations weave themselves in and out of the others' past and present lives. Pinter said, 'Most of the areas one writes about are finally pretty mysterious to the writer. If they're not, there's no discovery, there's no path, no journey at all.'³⁴¹ He has used mystery and image as a source of revelation and meaning. *Moonlight* came as a new journey where he discovered 'death as a new horizon' (*Moonlight*, p. 357). The play introduced a new note, which Pinter explored joyously. Following the political plays' conflict and anger, *Moonlight* was an interval of light, hope, and regeneration.

Pinter's earliest major work, *The Dwarfs*, established moonlight as one of his basic pre-occupations:

³³⁹ The references to *Moonlight* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

³⁴⁰ Billington, *The Life*, p. 338.

³⁴¹ Pinter at Cambridge Conference.

Isn't that the moon up there? It must be late, Len said. Can you see the lights there, on the roads? All that. They're bells. They have that sound. I can see the moon where I stand. It's all right. The globe's turning. This is not night. This isn't night. Can you hear the moon? Eh? And these lights? There's a bell here. We're making this bell. We're making the light. Can you hear the moon, through the sound? It is in us. (*The Dwarfs*, p. 115).

Pinter continued to work on the spiritual conquering of physical space and the relationship between physical and spiritual space. Thus *Moonlight* starts in the territory where *Party Time* ended: in a ghostly moonlit space. Like Jimmy in *Party Time*, the heroine in *Moonlight* is trapped in a dark spiritual space whose existence is only possible through human mortality. Pinter's early characters fought for 'rooms' to satisfy their primitive need to be protected. Rooms, as safe as wombs, have protected his people from external menace. *Moonlight* articulates 'death as a new horizon' where the characters find themselves in tombs instead of rooms. On the other hand, womb and tomb are compatible terms here; Andy yearns to return to the womb, to seek death, which is the final stasis. The correlation between womb and tomb is clear in Bel's claim that babies know more about death than 'we do':

We've forgotten death but they haven't forgotten it. They remember it. Because some of them, those who are really very young, remember the moment before their life began - it's not such a long time ago for them, you see - and the moment before their life began they were of course dead. (p. 358).

This yearning for death was central for Pete in *The Dwarfs*. And in a sense the later plays restore a philosophical breadth and intellectual overttness, which Pinter had partly conceded since that early novel:

I'm of a mind to abdicate. [...] Because I'm the axiom I will not escape. In the act of proof, after all, is the proof. The gaschamber, I won't deny it, is a ripe and purposive unit. I look into my garden and see walking blasphemies. A blasphemy is a terrible thing. They cut the throat of a child over the body of a naked woman. The blood runs down her back, the blood runs between the cheeks of her arse. In my sight the world commits sacrilege. I shall walk to my own coffin, when I have chosen to make time. Soon I shall place a tombstone upon that world. [...] The world is vanity. The world is impertinent. (*The Dwarfs*, pp. 111-12).

The world of Pinter's plays has been one of 'vanity' and 'impertinence'. In *Moonlight*, as Pinter promised through Pete, he placed a tombstone on the world of atrocities that he had been exploring in his political plays and retreated into more private landscapes to explore human isolation and suffering through death's barrenness. Here the absent/dead daughter Bridget exists in a spiritual location, which may be her tomb. She is hovering over the mortal worlds of her parents and brothers: her father Andy is on his deathbed, and her brother Fred is 'confined to [his] bed with a mortal disease'. Pinter clarified the play's central idea to Gussow, as 'a very simple question of an image of a man in bed, dying, and his wife was in the room. I knew he was a man of considerable vigour, and I am pretty sure that the line "Where are they?" was central to the whole.'³⁴² In *Moonlight*, Pinter tackles the themes of dying and separation in complex ways, including their presence within marriage, and between a father and his sons.

Moonlight explores the relationship between physical closeness and emotional distance. It involves three separate playing areas: Andy's bedroom, Fred's bedroom and Bridget's anti-spatial, intangible space. The mode of the setting is reminiscent of the

³⁴² Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 98.

memory plays of the late 1960s and 1970s where characters were also physically close yet emotionally miles apart, and specifically it recalls *Silence* in its articulation of three separated playing areas disengaged from each other. The action is formulated by fragmentary juxtapositions of each separate area; one space interrupting the other. It is important that while space in his political work refers to a definable, global socio-historical world, he suggests in this more poetical, metaphorical work, *Moonlight*, that it is not geography but emotional reality that determines the human landscape.

The play portrays another wasteland of human isolation and suffering. It starts and finishes with Bridget in faint light talking lyrically of light, darkness and the moon. Her location is not specified; she appears in 'An area' and is 'moving about in the night'. She is sleepless in her tomb. She is sleepless because 'there's no moon'. Untypically for a Pinter character, she is selfless: she does not want to wake her tired father and mother, who 'have given so much of their life for me and for my brothers. All their life, in fact. All their energies and all their love' (p. 319). Her task is to make sure that her parents 'sleep in peace and wake up rested. [...] Because I know that when they look at me they see that I am all they have left of their life' (p. 319). She is the only character who can commute between mortality and the eternal, and she builds a blurred bridge between solitude and association, youth and age.

The play goes between the corporeal and incorporeal landscapes. Bridget watches the tangible in her ghostly moonlit space. Her unlimited indistinct space is succeeded by her parents' bedroom, where her father, Andy, is on his deathbed. He is in his fifties and accompanied by his wife, Bel, at this alarming moment. Bel's failure to find their two sons makes her a target for Andy's mockery and bad jokes. Her efforts are pathetic and

‘enough to make the cat laugh’. But there is a relationship here that tames the humour and makes it indicate a bond, and a shared history, rather than just - as in so many of the earlier plays - aggression. Andy and Bel are making fun of each other. Their teasing creates genuinely amusing dialogues and Bel’s feelings for her apparently ill husband are expressed as a mockery of concern:

Do you feel anything? What do you feel? Do you feel hot? Or cold? Or both? What do you feel? Do you feel cold in your legs? Or hot? What about your fingers? What are they? Are they cold? Or hot? Or neither cold nor hot? (p. 321).

Pinter resists the conventional sentimentality of death. Andy himself displaces the sentimental as he watches Bel embroidering, ‘Oh. I’ve been meaning to ask you, What are you making there? A winding sheet? Are you going to wrap me up in it when I conk out? You’d better get a move on. I’m going fast.’ When Andy complains that his own wife is ‘taking the piss’ out of him, she claims that, due to her convent school education the term leaves her ‘nonplussed’, and Andy contrasts her convent school pretensions with the suggestion that she has always been over-sexed, ‘You’ve never been nonplussed in the whole of your voracious, lascivious, libidinous life’ (p. 321). He pedantically explains the term ‘taking the piss’ as ‘mockery. It means to mock’. Bel demands a rational explanation; and Andy replies, ‘Rationality went down the drain donkey’s years ago’. Logical explanations have gone out of use and have been absent for a long time. Logic/rationality has no place in today’s world and her logical mind is isolated now - ‘swimming about in waste disposal turdology’. Comic routines like this keep Andy alive. As John Lahr puts it, ‘Mockery is their oxygen and their substitute for passion.’³⁴³ Directing *The Homecoming*, Peter Hall said, ‘The phrase always on our

³⁴³ John Lahr, ‘Pinter’s Night Sweats’, *New Yorker*, 20 September 1993, pp. 108-10, (p. 110).

lips when we were doing this play was “taking the piss”. It’s a cockney phrase meaning getting the better of your opponent by mockery.’³⁴⁴ Similarly, he said, ‘a good deal of Harold’s tone has to do with that very veiled kind of mockery’. But now this language denotes a struggle for life as well as the old urge to conquer.

Ironically, Andy could have been a character in the political plays; he is a civil servant, his life was built on order, ‘I was admired and respected. I do not say I was loved. Love is an attribute no civil servant worth his salt would give house room to.’ He is a ‘loudmouth’ who ‘never swore in the office’ but kept his ‘obscene language for the home’ - personal excesses remain in the private sphere. In his room, he talks to Bel about his exemplary existence at work, and how he inspired the young men and women,

to put their shoulders to the wheel and their noses to the grindstone and to keep faith at all costs with the structure which after all ensured the ordered government of all our lives, which took perfect care of us, which held us to its bosom, as it were. (p. 333).

Andy yearns for Bridget. He wants to see his imaginary grandchildren to give them his blessing. Bel sits frozen as Andy talks of his poor grandchildren, about ‘to lose their grandad [...] when the door was about to open on new ever-widening and ever-lengthening horizons.’ Bel tries to comfort him with the thought that death is his new horizon, but Andy plays anxiously with her image: will he cross the horizon as he dies or after he is dead or will he perhaps ‘stay stuck’ in the middle of it? He pictures the weather in the horizon, ‘If it’s pitch black for ever what would have been the point of going through all these enervating charades in the first place?’ He hopes there is a

³⁴⁴ Peter Hall, ‘A Director’s Approach’, in *A Casebook on Harold Pinter’s ‘The Homecoming’*, ed. by John Lahr (New York: 1971), pp. 9-25 (p. 14).

‘loophole’ through which he would crawl and meet himself coming back. Like screaming on the brink of death, Pinter’s people have nothing to cling to but words, their ambiguities and associations.

Andy holds on to memory strongly. At the same time it is a play ‘about departure, about barely holding on, about letting go’.³⁴⁵ Pinter said, Andy ‘seems to deny the existence of more or less anybody else. He says at one point, “Nothing ever happened.” He denies the existence of his own life, except he’s so contradictory that he’s also asserting it all the time.’³⁴⁶ Like Max in *The Homecoming*, Andy is in discord with his sons and sees them as ‘lazy idle layabouts’, ‘a sponging parasitical pair of ponces. Sucking the tit of the state’ (p. 349). Pinter said that Max and Andy ‘have a language in common, a mode of using language’.³⁴⁷ Jake and Fred, the estranged sons, appear in Fred’s bedroom. They also communicate through bizarrely elaborate jokes, but unlike their parents they never quite take issues seriously. Most of their exchanges consist of plays on words that come about as a result of what the other has previously said; their conversations have their own logic but often are rather circular or impotent. Jake is in the position of the big brother keeping his little brother’s spirits up. He is a born artist/poet described by Fred as - like John Lewis’s department store, ‘never knowingly undersold’.

Fred, on the other hand, withdraws himself into a melancholic world and stays in bed through much of the play; as though they have inherited two sides of their dying father’s existence, ‘I’m much happier in bed. Staying in bed suits me’, he tells Jake, ‘I’d

³⁴⁵ John Peter, ‘Sleepless in N1’, *Sunday Times*, 12 September 1993, sec. 9, p. 15.

³⁴⁶ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 107.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

be very unhappy to get out of bed and go out and meet strangers and all that kind of thing' (p. 364). He is out of work and bedridden like Aston in *The Caretaker* and Len in *The Dwarfs*:

There's a dryrot in me. [...] I could stay in this armchair for ever. Or in bed. Yes. Do you know, I can't step out of bed? I'm unable to step out of the bed. I can't put my foot on the floor. I could stay there, always. [...] A sack of old bones. [...] I can't even commit suicide.

It's got to be a decision. That's an action. I can't act. (*The Dwarfs*, pp. 71-72).

Fred feels he has been left in darkness, and that his 'equilibrium is in tatters' (p. 364). Pinter explains Fred's position as 'a kind of nervous breakdown', which is 'a common condition for a lot of young men; perhaps even more young men than women'.³⁴⁸

Only Jake can adapt to society. He talks about scientific light meters, which can find 'whatever light is left in the dark', that they can locate the light, and 'place it in a little box. They wrap it up and tie a ribbon round it and you get it tax free, as a reward for all your labour and faith and all the concern and care for others you have demonstrated so eloquently for so long' (p. 365). This symbolic light 'will serve Fred as his own personal light eternal' (p. 365). Jake imagines a messianic role through which he saves Society, 'This is what we can do for the society' (p. 366). Pinter's focus in *Moonlight* is to mock the 'traditional mockery', the dominant social attitudes, which Pinter had been dramatising in his political plays and particularly in *Party Time*. Indeed, there are autobiographical elements here; Jake mocks the very same society that rewarded Pinter's 'labour and faith and all the concern and care for others', - which he had 'demonstrated so eloquently for so long' - with such hostile criticism.

³⁴⁸ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, pp. 99-100.

The exchanges between Fred and Jake are also a mockery of Andy's businesslike manner of organising his personal life, which refers to the whole system of bureaucracy (that Pinter explored in *The Trial*). Talking about his father, Jake makes fun of patriarchy:

He was not in it for pleasure or glory. Let me make that quite clear. Applause came not his way. Nor did he seek it. Gratitude came not his way. Nor did he seek it. Masturbation came not his way. Nor did he seek it. I'm sorry - I meant approbation came not his way - (p. 327).

Jake describes his confusion of the words 'masturbation/approbation' as a 'lapse in concentration', a slip, perhaps a Freudian slip.

According to Jake, his father 'adhered strictly to the rule of law'. Althusser conceptualises the father in Lacanian terms: 'the father' in its symbolic (rather than biological) dimension as the most powerful signifier 'of the Law, the fantasy image of all Right'.³⁴⁹ For Lacan and Althusser, the Father, 'who is Law [...] represents the Order of the human signifier [...] the Law of Culture, [the] discourse of the Other'.³⁵⁰ Pinter offers his own comic rewriting of Lacanian and Althusserian analysis: Andy's 'rule of law' links with the rule of his penis/phallic order. The rule of law is equal to the rule of thumb, which may also have an anatomical reference as the thumb is not far from the penis: 'Not as the crow flies' (p. 328). Fred and Jake have estranged themselves from their father because of his anatomical/symbolic power.

³⁴⁹ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 212.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

Fred's bedroom becomes literally a 'playing area' (as the stage direction emphasises - 'THREE MAIN PLAYING AREAS') where the overgrown boys constantly play name games:

JAKE What did you say your name was? I've made a note of it somewhere.

FRED Macpherson.

JAKE That's funny. I thought it was Gonzales.

[...]

FRED Yours was the name they gave me.

JAKE What name was that?

FRED Saunders. (pp. 338-39).

This game resembles some long-past military-unit scenario; these names could refer to unseen people in the play or to anyone or they could be nonsensical. As Katherine H. Burkman suggests, 'All in this play are strangers, yet all finally are the same, bear the same name.'³⁵¹ The name games are a metaphor, showing their struggle for identity and power. Similarly, Francis Gillen notes, 'Fred and Jake presumably would have been suffocated by Andy's civil service mentality; they had to establish their own identity.'³⁵² At one point, their dialogue echoes Hirst and Spooner's in *No Man's Land*, as they, too, remember each other by other names. Their dialogue also returns to *The Dwarfs*:

Listen here, Pete, Len said. Why do you always call me Weinblatt? My name is Weinstein.

Always has been. (*The Dwarfs*, p.17).

The logic of the word games works according to the rhythm that has always been important in Pinter's plays, 'Rhythm is extremely crucial to me. I find it very difficult to

³⁵¹ Burkman, 'Echo[es] in *Moonlight*', *Pinter Review*, Tampa, 1994, pp. 54-60 (p. 55).

³⁵² Gillen, "'Whatever Light is Left in the Dark": Harold Pinter's *MOONLIGHT*', *Pinter Review: Annual Essays*, 1992-93, pp. 31-37 (p. 37).

accept a line which is somehow inharmonious.³⁵³ Thus Jake and Fred discuss 'the life of Riley' in a rhythmic way:

FRED A marvellous people.

JAKE A proud people too.

FRED Watchful.

JAKE Wary.

FRED Touchy.

JAKE Bristly.

FRED Vengeful.

JAKE Absolutely ferocious, to be quite frank.

FRED Kick you in the balls as soon as look at you. (pp. 361-62).

The rhythm is important in all their dialogues. Reducing death to a logical/rational conclusion, Jake talks about his father's love; he tells Fred, 'I shall love him and be happy to pay the full price of that love', but the emotion dissolves into rhythm and wordplay:

FRED Which is the price of death.

JAKE The price of death, yes.

FRED Than which there's no greater price.

JAKE Than which?

FRED Than which.

Pause

Death -

JAKE Which is the price of love.

FRED A great great price.

JAKE A great and deadly price.

FRED But strictly in accordance with the will of God.

³⁵³ Pinter at Cambridge Conference. As Pinter read out scenes from his plays, his fascination with language, in all respects and in all of its nuances, were so apparent that the interrogation scene in *The Birthday Party* seemed to work largely by rhythm.

JAKE And the laws of nature.

FRED And common or garden astrological logic.

JAKE It's the first axiom.

FRED And the last.

JAKE It may well be both tautologous and contradictory. (pp. 367-68).

The verbal games-playing centres on their father, who is also a 'dream-dad' who left his fortune to his new-born son Jake. The audience is told his father called a meeting with the trustees (who 'were allowed to go to the lavatory just one and a half times a session') and 'The motion was carried, nine votes to four, Jorrocks abstaining' (the motion here may also suggest bowel movement). Unfortunately, there *is* no fortune and it is, therefore, Jake's conclusion that his father is 'a mountebank - a child - a shyster - a fool - a villain', 'Or' adds Fred, 'a saint'. They lampoon patriarchal power through the idea that Andy has blown all his money on a gambling party. Their father was already 'at the end of his tether' at the age of three. His being 'a feared force in the temples of the just' may have distanced his sons from him. And as Gillen argues, 'As a civil servant, Andy would have had neither the means nor the inclination to provide Jake with the freedom to write nor the sensitivity nor patience to deal with Fred's rebellion against what Andy regards as "the structure which after all ensured the ordered government of all our lives"''.³⁵⁴

They verbalise true or false 'memories' of their father, tinged with sympathy/pity and/or bitterness. They are obsessed with him - 'Spiritually furtive, politically bankrupt, morally scabrous and intellectually abject', 'spasmodically rampant', 'poetically downtrodden', and yet still the man they 'called...Dad'. They love their father and

³⁵⁴ Gillen, "“Whatever Light is Left in the Dark”", p. 33.

think 'he remained proud and fiery'. Nevertheless, the sons and the father never occupy the same territory. They perform a scene of denial in which two sons reject their father, their past, their familial bondage. Pinter said he was excited by 'the image of one family dislocated but very much part of each other.'³⁵⁵ The play is reminiscent of *Betrayal*, in which Robert verbally tortures Emma via 'the thought that I could very easily be a total stranger' (*Betrayal*, p. 218).

As for their mother, there is a sexual overtone: when Fred asks about her, Jake replies, 'Don't talk dirty to me.' Their mother's fond recollections of them are dispelled by Andy, first through mockery then through memories of their challenge to his authority. Bel insists that they were good boys who helped with the 'washing-up, the drying'. Andy insists that 'they were bastards' and Jake refused even 'to clean out the bloody broom cupboard'. In a later telephone conversation, which is also the climax of the play, Bel tells the boys that their father is at death's door; the boys claim to be a 'Chinese laundry'. Hearing their refusal to recognise her, Bel plays along with their game and asks if they are a dry-cleaners as well.³⁵⁶ Again the line between being a family and a 'total stranger' is blurred.

In *Moonlight*, 'Space is not defended as an extension of personality, but is merely a location occupied by characters who are isolated from their fellows.'³⁵⁷ On three occasions, Maria and her husband Ralph simply emerge from the darkness into various stage locations. They appear with the stories from the past. Maria, Bel's best friend,

³⁵⁵ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 105.

³⁵⁶ Burkman asks, 'If they are good sons who do help with the cleaning, why do they seem to be washing or cleaning their parents away? Has the potentiality and fertility of water and washing been replaced by an arid, *dry* cleaning'. Burkman, 'Echo[es] in *Moonlight*', p. 56.

³⁵⁷ D. Keith Peacock, *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre* (London: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. 156.

enters the boys' territory. Her monologue includes memories of the time when Fred and Jake were little boys, and when she had a great affection for their father. Her portrait of the young Andy is a contrast to Andy's present ill-tempered personality:

How he danced. One of the great waltzers. An elegance and grace long gone. A firmness and authority so seldom encountered. [...] Your mother was marvellously young and quickening every moment. I - I must say - particularly when I saw your mother being swirled across the floor by your father - felt buds breaking out all over the place. I thought I'd go mad. (p. 333).

Later in the play, Maria's husband, Ralph makes a similar entry into the boys' territory to give his monologue. Ralph (a former referee with an 'impotent whistle') talks to them about the past and their father; 'The man was a thinker. [...] The trouble with so much thinking, though, or with that which calls itself thinking, is that it's like farting Annie Laurie down a keyhole. A waste of your time and mine'. Ralph mocks 'thinking': 'it's confusing you, it's blinding you [...] it's making you so dizzy that by the end of the day you don't know whether you're on your arse or your elbow, you don't know whether you're coming or going' (p. 342).

Pinter recycles the theme of betrayal through these appearances of Maria and Ralph. Andy recalls the day Maria invited him to her flat 'for a slice of plumduff'. Andy betrayed Bel with Maria: 'But think of our past. [...] Think of the months I betrayed you with her. [...] she betrayed you with your husband and she betrayed her own husband - and me - with you!' (p. 351). Bel neither denies nor confirms her relationship with Maria. The triangular relationship echoes *Old Times* and, indeed, *Betrayal* where all the characters betray and are betrayed. Andy says, 'I had her in our bedroom, by the way, once or twice, on our bed. I was a man at the time. *Pause*. You probably had her

in the same place, of course. In our bedroom, on our bed' (p. 352). But what was once the subject that haunted Pinter's plays is now treated with half-comic detachment. Having dealt with repression, torture, and violent death in his preceding work, Pinter had a derisive approach to betrayal in *Moonlight*. It is a mockery of betrayal, a mockery of the relationships in so many of Pinter's plays.

Just as Maria and Ralph drift in and out of Jake and Fred's room, they also arrive and depart from Andy and Bel's room. Obsessed with their own superficial life, they fail to see that Andy is unwell. They talk about their cottage and boast about their children's success. Ralph recalls a shared past, but it is denied by Andy. As opposed to the characters in the memory plays (*Old Times*, *No Man's Land*), Andy does not create an imaginary past, he denies the existence of any past, 'I was a civil servant. I had no past. I remember no past. Nothing ever happened' (p. 378).

One of the few things Andy does claim to remember is that 'a woman walked towards [him] across a darkening room'. At this moment a faint light appears on Bridget's area, which suggests that the woman who walked towards Andy was Bridget. She says, 'I am walking slowly in a dense jungle. But I'm not suffocating. I can breathe. That is because I can see the sky through the leaves.' Bridget's voice is coming from death's place, and as we would expect from the earlier plays, she describes it in pastoral terms. It is as if she is comforting her father, who is so worried about death. She describes the flowers that surround her, the soft turf under her feet. Her pastoral language is associated with a celebratory attitude, even though she 'crossed so many fierce landscapes to get here. Thorns, stones, stinging nettles, barbed wire, skeletons of men and women in ditches. There was no hiding there. There was no yielding. There was no

solace, no shelter' (p. 337). Her landscape is desired but formless, mysterious, and impenetrable. Her description of the landscape recalls the pastoral space in *Mountain Language*, which also had a protective function for the female character:

But here there is shelter. I can hide. I am hidden. The flowers surround me but they do not imprison me. I am free. Hidden but free. I'm a captive no longer. I'm lost no longer. No one can find me or see me. I can be seen only by eyes of the jungle, eyes in the leaves. But they don't want to harm me. (p. 337).

She inhabits a dream world of 'velvet odour', which is filled by 'an echo like a bell'. Once more, a remnant of the pastoral tradition links nature with human emotion - the realm of woman and country.

In a sense, Bridget is a more confident reworking of Deborah in *A Kind of Alaska*. Bridget, too, is the teenage girl who is estranged from the family and inhabits a kind of 'Alaska'. She explains that she has been to barren, dead spaces. Like Bridget, Pinter was 15 when the war ended. Thus, her descriptions may suggest images of the Second World War; she admits discovering 'skeletons of men and women in ditches' (p. 337).

Pinter said, that in writing *Moonlight*, he 'found a sense of how the dead were present':

Andy says at one point that he doesn't know what death is. It's a question of the horizon. He doesn't know how light it is, how dark it is, anything. He doesn't know what the attributes of death are. But all this time Bridget is walking around in his life. As a ghost, she is present in his life. But he can't define her. He can't hold her.³⁵⁸

It is as if Andy's dying and Bridget's unite and they protect each other from fear. His final words are 'Tell Bridget not to be frightened. Tell Bridget I don't want her to be

³⁵⁸ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 124.

frightened' (p. 384). For once in all of Pinter's plays the divisions between human beings' personal spaces become bridged.

The play finishes with Bridget's description of a family invitation to a party and her own solitary arrival at a dark, deserted house bathed in moonlight. She stands there in the moonlight and waits for the moon to go down. John Peter suggests that Bridget's waiting for the moon to set is 'a human question mark facing the unknown'.³⁵⁹ Alternatively, the director David Leveaux said, her monologue 'is partly about Bridget's total separation from the parents, her sense of exile' and also 'describes the moment of her death. [...] it's a speech about dying alone'. He felt that Pinter was trying to put on stage 'something that is almost unspeakable which is the experience of death'.³⁶⁰ Nevertheless, *Moonlight*'s finishing on an expectation gives the play an optimistic relish and reminds us that there has always been more hope in Pinter's work than critics have generally appreciated. In *The Dwarfs*, Len trusted the light, which is always present even in the darkest night:

there's always a point of light in the centre of the lens, in the centre of your sight. [...]
There's always, even in the darkest night, a pinch, a fragment of light, poised in front of you.
[...] What this point of light does, it indicates the angle of your orbit. [...] It gives a sense of direction, even if you never move from the spot. (*The Dwarfs*, p. 7).

All Pinter's plays are about their titles. And moonlight is a pinch of light that illumines all the darkness of the universe. Literally the play itself is a fragment of light and hope showing a new direction. Pinter's new direction continues in *Ashes to Ashes*. *Moonlight* is the discovery of a light, which will illuminate Rebecca's 'angle' in *Ashes to Ashes*. While there was no hope for earlier characters, from Stanley to Jimmy, who

³⁵⁹ Peter, 'Sleepless in N1', p. 15.

³⁶⁰ Cited in Billington, *The Life*, p. 344.

were controlled and victimised, Rebecca will follow Bridget's path and resist authority, she will refuse to be controlled.

In conclusion, we should note that Bel defends Pinter's language, especially his use of verbal violence and obscenity, through her comments on Andy's speech. She warns us to look for the poetic sensibility and beauty that lies underneath:

All your life in all your personal and social attachments the language you employed was mainly coarse, crude, vacuous, puerile, obscene and brutal to a degree. Most people were ready to vomit after no more than ten minutes in your company. But this is not to say that beneath this vicious some would say demented exterior there did not exist a delicate even poetic sensibility, the sensibility of a young horse in the golden age, in the golden past of our forefathers. (p. 335).

***Moonlight*: An Echo or a New Light?**

For almost half a century, critics have been puzzled by Pinter's 'Pinteresque' language. Although *Moonlight* was greeted as a historically positive event - Pinter's first full-length play since *Betrayal* - most critics seemed unable to accept the play on its own terms, 'preferring to see it as a self-parody, and its author as trapped inside the Pinteresque'.³⁶¹ According to Benedict Nightingale, 'For all its oddities and obscurities, *Moonlight* marks a genuine return to form'.³⁶² Nicholas De Jongh was one of the critics who missed the play's point; he simply believed *Moonlight* was but a 'laboured imitation of his old great self'.³⁶³ Similarly, Martin Hoyle reminded his readers of Pinter's 'writer's block', arguing that here was 'a blocked talent going through the

³⁶¹ Ghilardi-Santacatterina, p. 114.

³⁶² Benedict Nightingale, 'Pinter Stages a Refreshing Return to the Family Business', *The Times*, 8 October 1993, p. 3.

³⁶³ Nicholas De Jongh, *Evening Standard*, 8 September 1993.

motions' producing 'a collection of Pinterisms: evasive gentility, shock four-letter words, mysterious codified exchanges'.³⁶⁴ The list carries on, as Claire Armistead wrote, 'At 62 Pinter is coming back into his own and confounding the theatrical obituarists who have for years been mourning his passing as a playwright able, or inclined to write at any length'.³⁶⁵ And Michael Coveney regarded the play as having 'the potent evanescence of his earlier disjointed reveries, *Landscape and Silence* (1969), and the purgatorial, between life-and-death bedroom bleakness of *A Kind of Alaska* (1973)'.³⁶⁶

There is a shadow of truth here, but we should rather read *Moonlight* as an extremely serious and sophisticated recycling of themes and images. Critics are right to stress the echoes from previous plays. His earlier work becomes a major theme here as his earlier characters and milieux reappear: 'the sculptured iciness of *No Man's Land*, the cockney swagger of *The Homecoming*, the ribaldry of *The Caretaker*'.³⁶⁷ Pinter is now in a position to explore memory in a new way - mining his memories of his own work, and our memories. He re-explores memory as a presumption that it is not functional, not logical and ungeneralisable. In his early work and the memory plays, men and women are revealed as having incompatible mental landscapes and desires. Men are both competitive and driven by anxiety; thus their landscape contains contradictions. *Moonlight* represents a dialectic between spirituality and materialism. It is a 'homecoming' in that he re-explores the poetics of terror, the subjectivity of memory, the unknowability of one's partner, the need for a tangible past and the idea of family

³⁶⁴ Martin Hoyle, *Mail on Sunday*, 12 September 1993.

³⁶⁵ Claire Armistead, 'Harold's New Baby', *Guardian*, 3 February 1993, p. 3.

³⁶⁶ Michael Coveney, 'Under a Dark Moon', *Observer*, 12 September 1993, p. 49.

³⁶⁷ Grant, p. 13.

life as a brutal battleground. *Moonlight* systematises and combines the theme of the family (from the early plays) with the theme of death (from the political plays).

Pinter said that family relationships and death are the heart of *Moonlight*, and he highlighted the theme of death as 'a strong element in [his] political nausea'.³⁶⁸ The play depicts the human contrasts: life and death, darkness and light, spirit and substance, emotional distance and physical closeness. The play is an evocation of the previous texts; the bond of isolated brotherhood recalls Mick and Aston; Andy's vulgar power is close to Max. Pinter said, 'there is some common factor in a lot of these central characters, [...] like Goldberg and Davies and Max and Andy. There's a lineage there, they're all pretty gross, one way or the other. The thing is, they seem to relish their own grossness.'³⁶⁹ The emotional distance between husband and wife recalls *Landscape*; the two-women/one-male triangle of past and mutual betrayals, is like a combination of *Old Times* and *Betrayal*; the play echoes *Family Voices*, which bears on another impractical homecoming. Pinter said that Andy's boys will never come; the characters 'seem to be so near, and they're not. They're thousands of miles away'.³⁷⁰ *Moonlight* also parallels *A kind of Alaska* in their similar portrayals of the alienated, teenage female figure. Of Bridget, Pinter said, 'Other people got older. She stopped',³⁷¹ which is a variation on Deborah's situation. In *Moonlight* it was widely assumed that there was something very personal as opposed to the other plays. However, Pinter said that 'My awareness of the facts of torture and states of affairs that exist in the world I take very personally indeed.'³⁷² Above all, perhaps - and this is

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 115.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 106.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 121.

what makes it far more than a mechanical reprise of those earlier works - *Moonlight* shows Pinter resisting his own grief and confirming, with great sincerity, the irresistible cycles of birth and decay, life and decomposition in an age where there are no value-systems or beliefs, and there is no salvation. The play leaves the audience with fear; indeed, it echoes the finale of *Party Time*. Jimmy describes how he is trapped and filled with the suffocating darkness. Bridget, too, is trapped in a dark place. As Regal points out, 'Both Jimmy and Bridget are steeped in light and yet, at the same time, trapped in perpetual darkness, ultimately cut off from the world around them',³⁷³ but the crucial difference is that in *Moonlight* Bridget's experience is confronted, not deferred and shirked.

The play's production of meaning by its relationship to Pinter's earlier work opens up a way of reading *Moonlight*. However, Pinter acknowledged that though the shape, the language and the flow of *Moonlight* were recognisable, 'it also has something new' which has 'surprised' him.³⁷⁴ Talking about the play's possible resemblance to *Silence*, in which there were also three areas, Pinter said, 'The narrative in *Moonlight* takes a very different form from anything I have ever written.'³⁷⁵ David Leveaux, who directed Pinter in *No Man's Land*, mentioned that *Moonlight* was a development of the line established with *No Man's Land*. Leveaux said that Pinter 'is very freely, in an extraordinarily released way, exploring the interior landscape of human beings and their essential loneliness'.³⁷⁶ *Moonlight* tended to divide conservative reviewers from those who saw themselves as progressives. While Michael Coveney 'hankered for the hard,

³⁷³ Martin S. Regal, *A Question of Timing* (London: Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 126.

³⁷⁴ Armistead, p. 3.

³⁷⁵ Gussow, *Conversations*, September 1993, p. 101.

³⁷⁶ Armistead, p. 3.

cutting, political edge' in the preceding shorter plays,³⁷⁷ Sheridan Morley was pleased with Pinter writing 'Pinteresque' plays again,³⁷⁸ and Paul Taylor thought *Moonlight* was a 'warmer work that seems to spring from some deeper core than his recent overtly political pieces'.³⁷⁹ John Lahr contrasted the aesthetics of Pinter's political plays and *Moonlight*, and he defined the latter as a gift that bears out W. B. Yeats's dictum: 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric; but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry'.³⁸⁰ But no matter what the critics wrote, Pinter believed that the 1990s had proved, in his own words, 'There's life in the old dog yet.'³⁸¹

There has been a constant tendency to reduce the idea of the 'Pinteresque' to language, when Pinter accurately applies his language to embody his world-view in his plays. *Moonlight* is no different. There is a studied image of the past, a feeling of familiarity and the power of habit and repetition. As Roland Barthes calls every text 'a new tissue of past citations',³⁸² so *Moonlight* shows a great deal of similarity to Pinter's earlier work. With *Moonlight*, Pinter re-imagines and reshapes his mostly dramatised patterns such as the working of memory, male-female perceptions of space, alienation, old age and finally, of course, the end is death. Thus, Bridget symbolises an anti-spatial environment, a conceptual rather than an embodied, filled, physical space. Although *Moonlight* appeared to draw a different picture to Pinter's political plays, the similarity is striking in the sense that *Moonlight*, like his political plays, reflects Pinter's private passions - passions that are restored with an awareness of human suffering and the

³⁷⁷ Coveney, 'Under a Dark Moon', p. 49.

³⁷⁸ See Sheridan Morley, 'Pinter Power', *Spectator*, 18 September 1993, p. 53. Morley writes that *Moonlight* certainly becomes Harold Pinter. Seeing the political plays as sketchy and desiccated civil-rights fragments, he evaluates *Moonlight* as a homecoming not only to *The Homecoming* but also to the vaudeville of life and death.

³⁷⁹ Paul Taylor, 'Ill met by *Moonlight*', *Independent*, 9 September 1993, p. 13.

³⁸⁰ Lahr, 'Pinter's Night Sweats', p. 108.

³⁸¹ David Sexton, 'Life in the Old Dog Yet', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 1995.

³⁸² Roland Barthes, 'Theory of the Text', in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 39.

human capacity to endure. His 1974 poem draws a relationship between moonlight, death, and the blackness of our age - a poem, demonstrating Pinter's pessimism as an intellectual investigator, and his will's optimism as a dissident humanitarian.

LATER³⁸³

Later. I look out at the moon.

I lived here once.

I remember the song.

Later. No sound here.

Moon on linoleum.

A child frowning.

Later. A voice singing.

I open the back door.

I lived here once.

Later. I open the back door.

Light gone. Dead trees.

Dead linoleum. Later.

Later. Blackness moving very fast.

Blackness fatly.

I live here now. (1974)

Ashes to Ashes: 'A world without a winner'

Like Baudelaire's last poem, *Fleurs du mal*, 'Le Voyage', *Moonlight* discovers death. Benjamin sees Baudelaire's last poem as 'The *flâneur*'s last journey: death. Its goal: novelty':

³⁸³ Pinter, 'Later', in *Various Voices*, p. 143.

O death, old captain, it is time, let us weigh anchor

(*O mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! Levons l'ancre!*).

To the depths of the unknown to find something new

(*Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!*).³⁸⁴

Moonlight is not Pinter's last journey, neither is *Ashes to Ashes*. But *Ashes to Ashes* is a very important journey through which he finds the novelty he has been looking for for so many years.³⁸⁵ He said that the play 'was simply a great deal to do with me. I've been haunted by the past and the present and the world around me. The world we live [in] is a very alarming place'. Talking about the impossibility of living in another world he said, 'we're living in this world, I capsule it in this woman [Rebecca]'.³⁸⁶ Through his heroine, Pinter makes the distinction between being an active participant and being a witness, a spectator in this 'alarming world'. The familiar scenes he has been writing about are ingrained in our physical memory. As contemporary audiences we all know about witnessing violence and feeling both helpless and cowardly in not acting. *Ashes to Ashes* is, finally, on the borderline between narrative and spectacle that plays with the effects of consequences of the audience's 'lived knowledge' by bringing together the strangeness and the familiarity of these notions, and by asking for the ethics of the situation.

Ashes to Ashes (1996) is a social analysis of 'Western culture'. In the play, Pinter is playing on 'Western' definitions of the concepts of history, time and place, and presenting their relativity. Written with the efficiency and lyricism of poetry, *Ashes to Ashes* is a journey back into all human history within one single act. Pinter insists on

³⁸⁴ Benjamin, 'Baudelaire or the Streets of Paris', p. 172.

³⁸⁵ The references to *Ashes to Ashes* are from *Plays: Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).

³⁸⁶ Pinter at Cambridge Conference.

total objectivity here and he erases all the distinctions between the relative terms. In the first draft of the play, the heroine, Rebecca said 'That's all crap. There is no East, there's no West'.³⁸⁷ The play provides snapshots from history, which remind the contemporary audience of the atrocities of World War Two, Bosnia, and Kosovo simultaneously, strengthening this idea of relativity and circularity in terms of time and place. The play proposes that history is not 'past', it is 'present', it is 'now'.

The play takes place at a country house in England, in the present. However, the particularity of time and place is delusory as the play's wide sense of universality can place us anywhere in time and space. Just as Rimbaud's spectator, Pinter, via Rebecca's series of stories, offers meaning through a perception beyond the limits of any particular reference. Pinter is not concerned with any specifics of one particular city. Rebecca's references to places and events become the context of another imaginary culture. Yet Pinter intermixes past and present and suggests 'a trans-historical view of the city'. As Rebecca's terrible scar of memories unravels, she draws a picture of the world in the twentieth century. Her recollections, fragments of memory, all involve images of people leaving with suitcases, masses walking into the water, the snatching of babies - all events that should have prompted some kind of intervention. She recounts many of them as if they were half her own experience, half others. She remains a spectator and narrates images ingrained in her memory, which suggest current events. At times she is intentionally provocative, deliberately angry. Thus, she is hoping to arouse a response that initiates action or heightens awareness in the audience.

³⁸⁷ *Ashes to Ashes, The Pinter Archive*, Box no. 67.

The play works as a melting pot. Here, Pinter blends the chemistries of the memory and political plays of the 1970s and 1980s, combining the world of obedience and subservience to mass political institutions with the politics of private relationships. Gradually *Ashes to Ashes* develops into a portrait of fascistic brutality in society and in the sexual imagination. It is an eclectic play where Pinter totalises the public and the private - indeed withdrawn - aspects of his creative personality. The play unites his concerns in the political plays with the privacy and the riddle of his earlier work. The male/female relationship, which in Pinter has always had the potential for both love and cruelty, settles and now symbolises the link between domestic oppression and political persecution.

Ashes to Ashes opens with an interrogation scene. Devlin explores Rebecca's past as she tells him of her ex-lover who would stand over her and clench his fist:

And then he'd put his other hand on my neck and grip it and bring my head towards him. His fist...grazed my mouth. And he'd say, 'Kiss my fist'. (p. 395).

The opening scene echoes *Old Times* and *The Lover* and, indeed, *One for the Road*, with a dominating male inquisitor standing with drink and charging the probing with eroticism. The lover adored her and 'He put a little...pressure...on my throat, yes. So that my head started to go back, gently but truly.' She says 'My body went back, slowly but truly' and her legs opened. Rebecca describes being offered a fist (weapon) to kiss, and then a palm (non-weapon). Rebecca's lover partly represents the deceptive nature of any oppressive regime that wishes to seduce in order to ensure compliance. He makes love to Rebecca in order to stop her questioning his work and his actions. The image of the 'fist', which is so visually powerful in the opening scene, also describes a world of brute masculine power.

Past and present overlap. Devlin is no different from Rebecca's former lover in terms of his sadomasochistic dominance. Devlin seems to be helping her decipher her fragments of memories, but his questioning aims at her hypnosis. The state of hypnosis indicates the power of the lover and Devlin, who both want Rebecca's co-operation. But Rebecca refuses to be overpowered by his questions: 'I think you're a fuckpig' (p. 398). At this point the rhythm of exchanges between Devlin and Rebecca breaks. Her unexpected obscene language is an innovation; in the previous plays the use of obscenity has been articulated by the male discourse. Rebecca is, after the Young Woman in *Mountain Language*, Pinter's second female character to challenge male discourse and power so directly. The change of sex in the use of obscene language implies that the Woman is not enigmatic anymore and it is clear that Rebecca is speaking for Pinter.

Devlin asserts that he is compelled to ask her questions, as there are so many things he does not know:

I know nothing...about any of this. Nothing. I'm in the dark. I need light. Or do you think my questions are illegitimate? (p. 399).³⁸⁸

Devlin wants Rebecca to draw him the concrete shape of her ex-lover; 'an image I can carry about with me' (p. 400). He is searching for the specific, for a single potential culprit for all the atrocities Rebecca is describing.

Their conversation draws attention to the fact that the actor has to interrogate and think through each individual word in performing *Ashes to Ashes* and that the audience

³⁸⁸ His use of 'illegitimate' is an unusual choice of word, which may refer to the image of snatched babies later in the play.

must try to do so. Pinter never wastes a single word. Devlin's calling Rebecca 'darling' opens up a battle over the word 'darling'. As Rebecca is Pinter's most independent female character, she refuses Devlin's label: 'Well I don't want to be your darling. It's the last thing I want to be. I'm nobody's darling' (p. 401). She refuses to be considered anybody's darling, as the word may suggest possession and control, but Devlin tries to trivialise her position by recalling a song, 'I'm nobody's darling'. As in *Old Times* Pinter combines female independence and song.

Word associations/song associations bring Devlin and Rebecca back to the lover. Rebecca does not wish to remember how he looked. Her memory is distorted so she is unable to describe an ex-lover who 'went away years ago' (p. 402). Moreover, she thinks 'what he looked like' 'is not the point'. She cannot define his job clearly, either:

I think it had something to do with a travel agency. I think he was some kind of courier. No. No, he wasn't. That was only a part-time job. I mean that was only part of the job in the agency. He was quite high up, you see. He had a lot of responsibilities. (p. 403).

The travel agency becomes a metaphor for deportation and for 'guiding' people to the camps.

On the other hand, she is able to describe concretely 'that place' where her ex-lover took her. She assumes Devlin knows about 'that place': 'How funny. I could swear I had. Told you' (p. 404). 'That place' is a kind of factory where 'they were making things - just like any other factory. But it wasn't the usual kind of factory' (p. 404). Again there is the sense of a lack of specific knowledge on Rebecca's side; presumably she was not prepared to confront what was really going on in the 'factory'. There the work-people 'doffed' their soft caps as Rebecca and her lover walked down the alleys. This 'doffing of hats' outwardly confirms their status, suggesting that the people

themselves are compliant, that they are dependent on his leadership, which is not quite human. The work-people 'had total faith in him. They respected his...purity, his conviction'. Rebecca remembers 'the place was so damp'; and she could not find the bathroom. Although the work-people 'weren't dressed for the weather', they were unaware of the damp, they did not have feelings, they were like automatons. There was no bathroom either; machines do not need to urinate or defecate. Rebecca goes on to describe that the work-people 'would follow him over a cliff and into the sea, if he asked them, he said. And sing in a chorus. They were in fact very musical, he said' (p. 405). At this point the play's past-time location crystallises; it is a slave labour camp in Nazi Germany and her lover 'did work for a travel agency. He was a guide. He used to go to the local railway station and walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers' (p. 407).

'Purity' and 'conviction' now denote Nazi eugenics. Many images of the play are derived from Gita Sereny's biography of Albert Speer, Hitler's favourite architect, and the Reich's Minister for Armaments and Munitions from 1942. Pinter said he was shocked by the fact that Speer organised, and was responsible for, the slave-labour factories in Nazi Germany. He was horrified by banal images (like the fact that these factories had no proper lavatories) as well as by sensational ones: Pinter has been haunted by the image of the Nazis picking up babies on bayonet-spikes and throwing them out of windows.³⁸⁹

The play's image of Holocaust, which take place in Dorset provoked some critics to comment on its 'inaccuracy'. Pinter does not agree that the play is merely about

³⁸⁹ Billington, *The Life*, p. 375.

Nazism or even its precise historical legacy. He said 'It's not simply the Nazis that I'm talking about in *Ashes to Ashes*, because it would be a dereliction on my part to simply concentrate on the Nazis and leave it at that'.³⁹⁰ He believes that 'the Holocaust is probably the worst thing that ever happened, because it was so calculated, deliberate and precise, and so fully documented by the people who actually did it';³⁹¹ but, nevertheless, the play is 'about us and our conception of our past and our history, and what it does to us in the present'.³⁹² Rebecca is haunted by certain appalling images, which have become part of her own experience, yet Pinter believes that she has not actually experienced them herself, which is 'the whole point of the play'.³⁹³ As I have argued before, Pinter refuses any historical reference. Rejecting history, *Ashes to Ashes* shows that the past is not another country.

Overall Pinter's heroine may appear a confusing character. On the one hand she appears victimised while on the other hand she seems to be complicit. Both she and Devlin were born after the end of World War Two, so their images and recollections are also indicative of more contemporary events and injustices, which make them even more sinister; that is, we all know about the atrocities of World War Two, but the play asks how many equally disturbing images have been hidden from us for political and economic purposes. Or rather, Pinter criticises a kind of 'abstraction' in the media - the most dominant manipulator of reality. Similarly, in his essay, 'It Never Happened' (1996), Pinter identified the dangers of 'language' that 'is actually employed to keep thought at bay', a language that suffocates people's intelligence and critical faculties. Pinter referred to the massacres in history and wrote that 'it never happened. [...] Even

³⁹⁰ Aragay, p. 11.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid., p. 10.

while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter. It was of no interest.'³⁹⁴

Therefore, Pinter has written *Ashes to Ashes* against an insidious self-censorship through the heroine who tries to resist on the one hand, but is also submissive on the other.

Rebecca's language drifts between past and present. From the descriptions of the factory and the shocking image of her lover snatching the babies, she passes on to the police siren that she says they 'heard a couple of minutes ago'. The atrocity Rebecca describes does not really seem to affect her at this point; this act of brutality remains suppressed, but the mere noise of a police siren causes her great distress and misplaced concern. She says:

I hate it fading away, I hate it echoing away. I hate it leaving me. I hate losing it. I hate somebody else possessing it. I want it to be mine, all the time. It's such a beautiful sound. (p. 408).

The police siren may be a signal of distress and help on its way or it may be the sound of repression. It reflects Rebecca's desire to be constantly secure and safe from any potential ills, and she ignores the distress of others around her. Yet she is afraid that others will ignore her misfortune, just as she appears to have taken no action over the atrocities she has witnessed. Devlin assures her she will hear the police siren again soon:

They're very busy people, the police. There's so much for them to do. They've got so much to take care of, to keep their eye on. They keep getting signals, mostly in code. There isn't one minute of the day when they're not charging around one corner or another in the world, in their police cars, ringing their sirens. So you can take comfort from that, at least. Can't you?

You'll never be lonely again. You'll never be without a police siren. I promise you. (p. 409).

³⁹⁴ Pinter, 'It Never Happened', in *Various Voices*, p. 198.

Through Rebecca's insecurity, and Devlin's feeling of comfort about the police siren, Pinter criticises the repressive 'police action' as he told his interviewers in 1998:

Don't let us forget the police also were given so many powers by the last Conservative government - more and more, all absolutely accepted by the then Labour opposition. And that opposition, now the Labour government, has actually taken *all* those laws, which are essentially repressive laws. Some of them are actually totalitarian, and our jolly old Labour government has taken over the lot.³⁹⁵

He draws an incisive picture of a world policed for the moral security of the populace. Truth becomes relative while propaganda becomes the creative tool of the state.

Meanwhile, Devlin has still not 'quite got into focus' about the lover. He goes on probing; he struggles to get Rebecca back to the man's image. However she refuses his attempt to control her and so she describes her own fragments of memory, which are mostly to do with the suffering of the innocent. She talks about an 'innocent pen' rolling off the coffee table when she was writing a laundry list. Here laundry is associated with dirty washing; it reveals the pen's ability to bring to attention the things that she wishes to wash away. She is surprised at the apparent autonomy of this object, defining itself by initiating its own movement. The image of the 'innocent pen' also suggests a metaphor for the writer/reporter. Devlin insists that she cannot know the pen was innocent:

Because you don't know where it had been. You don't know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it.

You know nothing of its history. You know nothing of its parents' history. (p. 410).

Here Pinter identifies the innocence of the writer. As his 1950 poem *Rural Idyll* put it, Pinter has been 'Slicing a story with a pen'; he has been using his pen to cut through to

³⁹⁵ Gottlieb, p. 25.

the essence of the stories of his century. The exiled people and torn babies - images of the purification of a race - present the undercurrents of his time. For over forty years, and with increasing clarity, Pinter has been using his pen to write about the suffering of the innocent world-wide.

Devlin redirects the stream of the conversation as he tries to overpower Rebecca: 'You can't sit there and say things like that.' Devlin is a kind of devil's advocate; he is a negative figure of male power but has moments of intellectual force and clarity and now he reminds Rebecca that she is not entitled to sit there and do nothing/remain complicit. And then he no longer pursues the inquiry; he does not push the point:

I'm letting you off the hook. Have you noticed? Or perhaps it's me who's slipping. It's dangerous. Do you notice? I'm in a quicksand. (p. 412).

Rebecca's reference to 'God' at this point encourages Devlin, who thinks that he has the authority to delimit the play's acceptable 'perceptions':

You think God is sinking into a quicksand? That's what I would call a truly disgusting perception. If it can be dignified by the word perception. Be careful how you talk about God. He's the only God we have. If you let him go he won't come back. He won't even look back over his shoulder. And then what will you do? You know what it'll be like, such a vacuum? It'll be like England playing Brazil at Wembley and not a soul in the stadium. Can you imagine? Playing both halves to a totally empty house. The game of the century. Absolute silence. Apart from the referee's whistle and a fair bit of fucking and blinding. If you turn away from God it means that the great and noble game of soccer will fall into permanent oblivion. No score for extra time after extra time after extra time, no score for time everlasting, for time without end. Absence. Stalemate. Paralysis. A world without a winner.

Pause.

I hope you get the picture. (p. 412).

The comedy of likening the absence of God to the absence of spectators at a football match implies that God depends on the people to confirm 'His' existence. Pinter has disputed the relationship between the suffering of the innocent and God since his adaptation of *The Trial*. He said 'One of the captions I would put on *The Trial* is simply: What kind of game is God playing. That's what Josef K. is really asking. And the only answer he gets is a pretty brutal one.' Pinter's 1993 poem, *God*, clarifies a similar discord between human beings and God:

God looked into his secret heart
 To find a word
 To bless the living throng below.
 [...]
 He found with harshly burning pain
 He had no blessing to bestow.³⁹⁶

Again, regarding Rebecca's account of the 'lover, babies, mothers and platforms' Devlin asks, 'What authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?' (p. 413). Devlin is an inquisitor who does not really want the 'truth' revealed. He is more interested in the erotic aspect of Rebecca's liaisons. The bigger picture is obliterated in favour of the specific abuse of Rebecca's body: Devlin reminds her that her lover wanted to do her to death. He wants answers/excuses for her silence:

Why didn't you confide in me? Why didn't you confess? You would have felt so much better.
 Honestly. You could have treated me like a priest. (p. 415).

³⁹⁶ Pinter, 'God', in *Various Voices*, p. 158.

Ashes to Ashes shows the mind ebbing and flowing between the specific and the vast; Pinter develops a new apocalyptic poetry. He includes both the idyllic possibilities and the inner turmoil in a long segment, mostly silent. Rebecca looks out of the garden window in that house in Dorset and remembers seeing 'a whole crowd of people walking through the woods, in the direction of the sea' (p. 416). The 'guides' were ushering the people into the sea and the tide covered them slowly until their bags bobbed about in the waves. She combines her memory with a crucial speech on 'mental elephantiasis':

This mental elephantiasis means that when you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it immediately expands and becomes a vast sea of gravy. It becomes a sea of gravy which surrounds you on all sides and you suffocate in a voluminous sea of gravy. It's terrible. But it's all your own fault. You brought it upon yourself. You are not the *victim* of it, you are the *cause* of it. Because it was you who spilt the gravy in the first place, it was you who handed over the bundle. (p. 417).

Rebecca removes herself from responsibility, projecting the blame onto the exiled and robbed victims themselves. She refuses to be involved in the atrocities she is narrating. She remains a 'spectator'. Thus Pinter holds up the contemporary audience's voyeurism and indifference to criticism.

Rebecca sees through her memories and the garden window opens to a source of intense and imaginative spiritual isolation. She then talks about a dream in which she describes an imaginary picture of a 'frozen city':

I walked out into the frozen city. Even the mud was frozen. And the snow was a funny colour. It wasn't white. [...] It was as if there were veins running through it. And it wasn't smooth, as snow is, as snow should be. It was bumpy. And when I got to the railway station I saw the

train. Other people were there. [...] I watched him walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers. (p. 418).

Devlin tries to remove Rebecca from her recollections and focuses the conversation once again. He asks if she saw her sister Kim and her children. But in this play nothing is merely specific: his question opens up a discussion of children and the basis of language: Rebecca tells him that Kim's son, Ben, says "My name is Ben". [...] "Mummy's name is Mummy" (p. 420). Pinter emphasises the simplicity and innocence of children's language as opposed to the complicated and calculated language that is used in daily life. Carey Perloff notes, 'Even when setting work in nonspecific locations, and exploring generically named characters, what always interests Pinter is the English language and how that language, his own language, can be manipulated and distorted to inflict violence on another person.'³⁹⁷ Similarly, Pinter has said that many of his plays 'have to do with that mode of operation, of terrorising through words of power - verbal power, verbal facility.'³⁹⁸

As the couple examine dreams and defending territory, the play becomes deliberately confusing; the audience cannot be sure if these memories are dreams or televisual recollections of world events. It is like switching the television on all the time and discussing day-to-day events at the same time. This talk of daily life is broken by Rebecca's recollection of a film she saw after tea with Kim. It was a comedy about a woman taken to a desert by a man. Other members of the audience laughed but she was unable to react 'normally' to comedy. And the man sitting in front of Rebecca never laughed either, but just sat like a corpse. She says that she 'moved far away from him', driven by the need to avoid non-conformists like the man who did not laugh, and

³⁹⁷ Perloff, p. 15.

³⁹⁸ Ford, p. 5.

by the need to avoid contact with those who might force us to confront our own non-conformity.

Rebecca returns to her confessions and once more talks about the icy city, where she once saw an old man and a little boy dragging suitcases down the street, followed by a woman carefully carrying a baby over the bumps. She says that 'the baby was a girl' - which she could not actually have known - and then adds that 'the baby's heart was beating'. (p. 427). At this moment the light in the room darkens and the lamps become very bright. Rebecca sits very still. She says that the baby was breathing: 'I held her to me. She was breathing. Her heart was beating' (p. 428). This is a moment of shifted subjectivity as Rebecca places herself in the situation of the woman giving up her child. Or is this only a story? Ambiguity remains. Devlin, too, adopts the role of another; he now acts like Rebecca's lover, the killer of the children. He re-enacts the scene of control; he makes a fist and asks her to kiss it. But this time Rebecca does not comply; she speaks of what she experienced. In 1971, Pinter said to Gussow, that nothing heroic happens in his plays, 'But I do think that some characters show a great deal of courage, and possess a great deal of stamina in the face of life'.³⁹⁹ Rebecca is definitely one of them.

All these images, as they disconnect and unite with each other, lose definition in the course of the play. They can be dreams, fears and memories overlapping one another and powerfully building pictures of the Holocaust/world events. The images work powerfully; they are primarily passive in the narration but then become active, visual and concrete in the acting. Rebecca describes how her lover claims that his workers 'would follow him over a cliff and into the sea' and then imagines the same image

³⁹⁹ Gussow, *Conversations*, December 1971, p. 20.

glimpsed through a Dorset garden window. The play is built around echoes, dreams, memories, 'and exactly as in *Old Times*, the act of describing one's memories lends them a living actuality'.⁴⁰⁰ At the end of the play, Rebecca performs the role of the mother at the station. As she was going towards the train she took her baby and wrapped it in a shawl; she made it into a bundle in order to hide the child. Then when the baby cried out, the man called her back and asked her what she had there:

REBECCA He stretched out his hand for the bundle

ECHO for the bundle

REBECCA And I gave him the bundle

ECHO the bundle

REBECCA And that's the last time I held the bundle

ECHO the bundle (p. 431).

She gets on the train and a woman asks her what had happened to her baby:

REBECCA I don't have a baby.

ECHO a baby

REBECCA I don't know of any baby.

ECHO of any baby

Pause

REBECCA I don't know of any baby.

Long silence

Blackout (pp. 432-33)

All Rebecca's final words are repeated by the Echo to show the recurrence of similar atrocities in all times and places, to display the fact that the past is not another country. The end of the play suggests a correlation between the echoing police siren and the baby that Rebecca has lost. The finale refers, through a metaphorical flashback, to the

⁴⁰⁰ Billington, *The Life*, p. 379.

police siren and the sense of loss it caused her. Her attitude of denial ('I have no baby') indicates the general human negligence that Pinter wishes to see changed or expelled. Her blurring of different fragments, regardless of time and place, develops Pinter's own articulation of metaphors of space; and Rebecca's growing moral involvement with her memories perhaps reflects her author's. Indeed, just after Pinter directed *Ashes to Ashes*, he wanted to 'televise it, to record it, because very few people saw it. The Royal Court Theatre Upstairs is so small there were only about a hundred people in every night. I thought the BBC would provide an opportunity for a much broader audience. But there was no chance', which Pinter evaluated as 'a growing philistinism, disdain and dislike' in Britain.⁴⁰¹

Ashes to Ashes is a play of echoes in which Pinter recapitulates his earlier motifs. It contains familiar elements and focal points from his earlier work: the male/female relationship, the struggle for dominance, the presence of the past. The echoes of *Old Times* are there with the fondness of old tunes and going to the movies. Rebecca seems to have been the victim of an assault, but Devlin is injured, too; he is ignorant of Rebecca's seemingly secret love - which recalls the relationship between Richard and Sarah in *The Lover*. The play also shares a line with the later political plays: the line of violence between victim and victimiser, the connection between domestic and political violence (*One for the Road*) and the use of power in the form of seductiveness to assert compliance (*Party Time*). Pinter develops the idea of the 'clenched fist' from *Party Time*, in which police action is demanded to establish order:

⁴⁰¹ Gottlieb, p. 16.

DOUGLAS We want peace and we're going to get it. But we want that peace to be cast iron. No leaks. No draughts. Cast iron. Tight as a drum. That's the kind of peace we want and that's the kind of peace we're going to get. A cast iron peace.

He clenches his fist.

Like this.

FRED You know, I really admire people like you.

DOUGLAS So do I. (*Party Time*, pp. 292-93)

In fact, the themes of mass killing and the slaughter of babies in *Ashes to Ashes* echo Terry's speech in *Party Time*. Terry talks about the 'dozens of options' for mass killings:

We could suffocate every single one of you at a given signal or we could shove a broomstick up each individual arse at another given signal or we could poison all the mother's milk in the world so that every baby would drop dead before it opened its perverted bloody mouth. (*Party Time*, p. 302).

However, these echoes do not mean that Pinter is simply writing about the same issues. What makes *Ashes to Ashes* unique is the female character's resistance, her refusal to be either the 'cause' or the 'victim' of any atrocity. It is clear that while the victim, Jimmy, sits sucking the dark in *Party Time*, Rebecca discovers her power not to be a victim - 'through imagination and empathy'.⁴⁰²

For Jane Edwardes, in *Time Out*, the play marked a new territory for Pinter:

By kaleidoscoping time and changing the location, he incongruously conjures a relationship between wartime Germany and Dorset today. Like Sarah Kane, Pinter brings the brutality we read about in the newspapers or see on the television right into the couple's home territory.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² Gillen, 'History as a Single Act: Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*, *Cycnos*, 3(1997), pp. 91-97 (p. 91).

⁴⁰³ Jane Edwardes, *Time Out*, 24 June 1998, *Theatre Record*, 18(1998), p. 815.

One hears echoes from other playwrights' plays, too. The opening interrogation scene about the 'lover' is an echo of the opening scene of James Joyce's *Exiles*, which Pinter directed in 1970. *Ashes to Ashes* recalls Edward Bond's *The Bundle*, which is a play about babies. In *The Bundle*, the protagonist says, 'All men are torn from their mother's womb: that is the law of nature. All men are torn from their mother's arms: that is the law of men!' (*The Bundle*, p. 29)⁴⁰⁴, which is the central image of Pinter's play. *Ashes to Ashes* also recalls Edward Bond's *Summer*, which is about the devastating effects of the Nazi past on the present.⁴⁰⁵ Pinter may be deliberately relating his work to that of his 'political' successors and paying a compliment to these who were writing political plays before he was established as a 'political writer'.

While Pinter's earlier plays illustrate characters trapped in particular places, battling compulsively for territory, *Ashes to Ashes* depicts a metaphor of place. Ironically, in the first draft of the play, Devlin says that Rebecca's basic disease is metaphor:

A - That's what some of you girls don't understand. Metaphor will get you nowhere.

B - No. That's exactly what some of us girls *do* understand.

The play aims to arouse awareness in 'Western' audiences that sees these atrocities as happening elsewhere. Pinter shows that the images the play explores are not foreign, but contemporary and universal. This idea of metaphor of place is strengthened again in the first draft as B (Rebecca) talks to A (Devlin) about her lover:

B - ... he went away. That was it. To points West. He joined some kind of caravanserai. So perhaps it was points East. Caravanserais don't go to points West, do they? ... - if they go at all - they go to points East. Actually, that's all crap. There's no East, there's no West.

⁴⁰⁴ Edward Bond, *The Bundle* (London: Methuen, 1978).

⁴⁰⁵ Bond, *Summer* (London: Methuen, 1982).

A - And there are no caravanserais.

B - Of course there are caravanserais.

A - Going in which direction?

B - Marking time...waiting for the route maps, waiting for petrol, you know, waiting for the signal, waiting for the whistle.⁴⁰⁶

Although the play consists of domestic interrogation scenes, most of the time Devlin and Rebecca inhabit their own corners. Devlin is too terrified to face up to what he does not know, and Rebecca is either a traumatised passive witness of the holocaust, or too frightened to encounter what she knows. Nevertheless, her persistence, strength and consistency turn into refusal: the play ends with her self-denial: 'I have no baby'. Pinter shows how the civilised but blinded 'Western' people fail to see the actualities, and thus co-operate in atrocities. Pinter's poem *Cricket at Night* (1995) effectively illustrates how blindness poses as sight in our society:

They are trying to find a new trick
Where the ball moves to darkness from light
They are determined to paint the scene black
But a blackness compounded by white
They are dying to pass a new law
Where blindness is deemed to be sight

They are still playing cricket at night.⁴⁰⁷

We are raised to perceive the world in dualisms: east/west, south/north, female/male, etc. Yet within the human psyche there is a need for oneness as Rebecca denies any

⁴⁰⁶ The first draft of *Ashes to Ashes*, Pinter Archive, Box no. 67.

⁴⁰⁷ Pinter, 'Cricket at Night', in *Various Voices*, p. 160.

distinction between 'east' and 'west'. Thus the idea behind Rebecca's shifted subjectivity, and indeed Devlin's too, is to insist that the political past is not another country. It is our past and our present. There are no distinctions between private and public perspectives or private and public responsibility. In a sense, Rebecca is defending Pinter and tying his career together.

The more Pinter became an activist on the public stage in the 1980s and 1990s, the more he became conscious of the abuse of language, which had always been a fundamental factor in his work:

We're talking about a debased language in which the lie is simply automatic and quite persuasive and infinitely pervasive. It pervades the tradition in which we live, and certainly for the last 40 years this has been the case in what we call our Western democracies.⁴⁰⁸

Pinter, the playwright, becomes a critic of Eurocentricism. Through Rebecca, who both construes and denies, Pinter draws a constitutive geo-culture of the modern world. *Ashes to Ashes* plays out the idea that history has ended, only the consequences carry on.

⁴⁰⁸ Gussow, *Conversations*, October 1989, p. 85.

CONCLUSION

For half a century Pinter has made a distinctive contribution to twentieth century theatre. He has blurred the distinction between the fictional and the real world. His dramas have articulated a 'theory of power', a poetry of time, memory, sexuality, loss, separation and solitude through the power of language. He has donated a new language to present a 'global' view of our times. In addition to theatre - one of the most powerful modes of communication - he has written substantially for an even more powerful medium, the screen, to reach the potential mass audience. His political involvement, both internationally and as an opponent of Thatcherism, has documented itself in his mature plays and essays in which he has charted the relationship between the individual and the collective and portrayed political and social repression in the contemporary world. He criticises the authoritarian state as an example of ideology's ability to mystify and abstract its own operations.

Pinter has delimited the visual theatrical space into a room. His characters are confined in their rooms, and they use this basic unit of space as a cause for celebration and for despair as they explore the inner spaces of their minds. His earlier works are an evocation of geographical spaces as metaphors for gender consciousness. While the city in the earlier plays is revealed as masculine, anti-human and in decline, the pastoral is feminine, desired but formless. On the other hand, his political plays portray Pinter's link between personal analysis and criticism. He identifies a city, a society of contempt and misery beyond his haunting, fragmented domestic sets.

The characters' diegetic narratives refer to fictional urban societies and landscapes. Pinter is a self-consciously modernist writer; he adapts theoretical traditions for his

own purposes. This thesis has explored Pinter's reworking of the modernist notions of the city and the classical images of the pastoral, and the relationships in his works between locality, language and gender. I have been using theories of modernity to identify Pinter's disinterested voyeurs, his lonely figures haunting the streets of the city, his people who watch the spectacle of modern life. Similarly, Kuppers argues that the *flâneur* is as central to the 'nineties cityscape as to that of Baudelaire's Paris, of which Benjamin was writing, or to his own inter-war Berlin'.⁴⁰⁹ Like Benjamin, Pinter is interested in the ways in which the institution of the city shapes and interacts with human consciousness. Benjamin's concept of the *flâneur* is helpful in tracing the complexities of being, moving, and witnessing in Pinter's city.

Pinter's 'absurd', 'mysterious' dramas have characterised him as a true representative of this atrocious century of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and Kosovo. His creative output blurs the line between actual and play. Especially in his political plays, he fleshes out his objective/historical analysis with personal and poetic narratives of drama. Drama is an art form beyond historicity; it is so immediate that there is only now. Drama gives the opportunity to people to watch a bracketed portion of their actual lives on stage. In Rosen's words, 'Contemporary history has become a great theatrical event which is observed from a distance and in which one can no longer participate except as an enlightened amateur.'⁴¹⁰ Pinter interrogates borders and boundaries in our alarming world; thus his city is 'global'.

⁴⁰⁹ Petra Kuppers, 'Moving in the Cityscape: Performance and the Embodied Experience of the *Flâneur*', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 15.4(November 1999), pp. 308-17 (p. 308).

⁴¹⁰ Rosen, p. 279.

His political dramas explore 'the city' as an extension of his own experience, with facts and documentary evidence that he has identified through his public involvement. He combines his dramatic art with his analytic observations and commits himself to showing the middle classes what they will not or cannot see. Through public activism and art, Pinter has tried to seek out the truth - the 'abstracted realities' - and make it public. In 1989, Pinter said that he had always hated propaganda plays; 'Nevertheless, I still feel there is a role somewhere for a kind of work which is not in strict terms pursuing the normal narrative procedures of drama. It's to be found, and I'm trying to find it.'⁴¹¹ Gradually he has found that new voice with *Ashes to Ashes*, an objective microcosm of twentieth century history. With this play, he arrests the attention of the spectators, inviting them to question the stability of their own world - the world outside the theatre - and shows them the power to understand and share the other's vision of the world.

Diana Taylor has argued that 'Theatre is an unstable vehicle for expression, as capable of obscuring problems as it is of clarifying them, as instrumental in mythifying victimisation as in working to end it.'⁴¹² Nonetheless, in the 1980s, Pinter set out to develop ways to expose and hopefully help to end oppression: 'I've always had a deeply embedded suspicion of political structures, of governments and the way people are used by them'. He felt 'raddled' by ever-present images of imprisonment and torture around the world - suppressed information to which he, as a celebrated writer, had privileged access - and he was bitter at the increasingly virulent dogmas of the New Right in Britain and abroad. Thus, in these plays, he transforms society into a terrifying

⁴¹¹ Gussow, *Conversations*, October 1989, p. 93.

⁴¹² Diana Taylor, 'Theatre and Terrorism: Griselda Gabor's *Information for Foreigners*', *Theatre Journal*, 42.2(May 1990), pp. 165-82 (p. 168).

theatrical set. He said that he, 'in common with a great body of people have been sleepwalking for many years'.⁴¹³ With *Party Time*, the mirror was held up to the 'sleepwalking' audience. Thus, Pinter implores a need for 'intellectual curiosity and political responsibility'.⁴¹⁴

Harold Pinter's work explores the depth of the human condition. His political works are concerned with much more than a study of the traumatic effects of torture and 'democratic' dictatorship, even though this was a serious part of his intention. Pinter recognised his obligation to *his* society and said of himself that he must participate in the task of showing the audience the facts.⁴¹⁵ He presents the audience with a disturbing and severe vision of the authoritarian experience. Like all literature (arguably), his drama shows a commitment to formulating the basic values of society and is both a reflection and a criticism of those values. His plays reflect his private passions. They are imbued with an awareness of suffering and the human capacity to endure. His concern, therefore, is with individuals, whose passions and hopes and fears are permanent. At the dawn of a new millennium Pinter hopes for 'solidarity' 'to keep the political consciousness awake'.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Cited in Ronald Knowles, *Understanding Harold Pinter*, p. 185. Originally from a TV news item covering a show at the Barbican in London, on behalf of imprisoned writers, on Channel Four News, 9 January 1984.

⁴¹⁴ Gottlieb, p. 17.

⁴¹⁵ Hern, p. 11.

⁴¹⁶ Gottlieb, p. 26.

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